SERMONS.

IN

TWO VOLUMES.

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SERMONS.

BY THE LATE REVEREND

GEORGE CARR,

SENIOR CLERGYMAN of the *Engliſh Epiſcopal Congregation* in Edinburgh.

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SERMON I.

Wiſdom of a religious courſe of life.

JOB xxviii. 28.

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom, and to depart from evil is underſtanding.

OUR Creator, who has appointed this world to be the preſent ſcene of our being, has been pleaſed to place good and evil, life and death, before us, and has left them to our own free election; has intruſted our happineſs or miſery to our own conduct, and made them to depend upon ourſelves. The moſt important concernment of life, therefore, is, to make a right and prudent choice. It is of the laſt conſequence to conſider well by what principles we ſhall form our conduct; upon what plan

we ſhall act; whether we ſhall ſearch for the proper happineſs of our nature in the paths of virtue, or in the ways of vice; whether we ſhall attend to the directions of unerring wiſdom, or follow the counſels of our own paſſions; whether we ſhall purſue the moral plan which the light of Nature diſcovers, and which the light of the Goſpel illuſtrates and enforces; or whether we ſhall reject the divine inſtructions; and, regardleſs of conſequences here or hereafter, ſeize the pleaſures of the preſent hour, walk in the ways of our heart, and in the ſight of our eyes, and go on where-ever ſeducements may invite, or inclination prompt us.

The wiſdom of a religious choice, aſſerted in the text, may appear from the following conſiderations.

I. CERTAIN it is, that the whole body of moral or religious laws, are the laws of the wiſe and good Legiſlator of the World, whoſe deſign in imparting to us our being, was doubtleſs to communicate a portion of his happineſs; and whoſe view in giving us laws, was as certainly to promote that happineſs,

pineſs, and to improve it to the utmoſt capacity of our nature. For, moſt aſſuredly, he can have no perſonal intereſt in view. He can require nothing from us for his own ſake, not even the worſhip we are to render him, nor the glory we are to aſcribe to him. Our imperfect praiſes and ignorant adorations can add nothing to the fulneſs of his felicity; nor can we detract from it by our neglect or diſobedience. For *can a man be profitable to God? or is it gain to him if thou makeſt thy ways perfect? If thou be righteous, what giveſt thou him? or what receiveth he at thine hand?*

His perfections alſo forbid us to ſuppoſe that he can derive pleaſure from the dependence or ſervitude of his creatures, or that he can delight in iſſuing arbitrary injunctions, or deſpotic mandates. His laws can be conſidered in no other light than as rules of conduct, reſulting from the frame and conſtitution of our nature, and neceſſary to our well-being. While Religion, therefore, is our guide, and we conduct our ſteps by the direction of the ſupreme Lawgiver,

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the divine wiſdom is our ſecurity, that our paths ſhall terminate in peace.

II. In order to vindicate the wiſdom of a religious conduct, it may not be improper to obviate a prejudice too commonly propagated, and too eaſily received, That the felicities of the next world are not to be obtained, according to the ſtrict terms of Chriſtianity, without renouncing the enjoyments of the preſent. Religion is too often repreſented with an unpleaſing countenance, and ſevere aſpect, interdicting pleaſures, exacting hard ſervices, commanding us to wage perpetual war with the world, and our own nature. Were this repreſentation juſt, we could draw no concluſion againſt the wiſdom of religious obedience,—ſince infinite is the diſproportion between the two worlds,—between time and eternity; and we could not think it an unreaſonable condition of eternal ſalvation, if we were required to employ the whole of a ſhort life in the immediate ſervice of God. An eternity of happineſs is ſurely worth the obedience and ſervice

vice of a few years, how difficult ſoever the obedience may be.

But the merciful Author of religion has not dealt thus hardly with mankind. Its wiſe and eaſy reſtraints preclude us from no enjoyments that reaſon approves; from none that we can deſire with prudence, or enjoy with ſafety. Religion prohibits only thoſe ſpecious, but deſtructive evils, which the paſſions of mankind have dreſſed up in the diſguiſe of pleaſure; thoſe irregular purſuits, in which no wiſe man would ever place his happineſs, or could ever find it.

God, who has filled the earth with his goodneſs, and ſurrounded us with objects which he made agreeable to our nature, cannot be ſuppoſed to require us to reject his bounty, and to look on them all as on the fruit of that tree in paradiſe, which was pleaſant to the eye, but forbidden to be taſted. Too apt, indeed, are we to imitate the diſobedience of our firſt parent; and, like him, not ſatisfied with eating freely of every tree which our Creator offers to us in this garden of nature, we too often liſten to every tempter, and expect to find pleaſure in the forbidden

forbidden fruits of vice. But be the pleaſures of vice what they may, there is ſtill a ſuperior pleaſure in ſubduing the paſſions of it: for it is the pleaſure of reaſon and wiſdom; the pleaſure of an intellectual, not a mere animal being; a pleaſure that will always ſtand the teſt of reflection, and never fails to impart true and permanent ſatisfaction.

The duties of religion are indeed, in all reſpects, ſo conformable to thoſe principles which our Creator has impreſſed on our mind, and ſtrike ſuch harmony upon the ſoul, and diffuſe ſuch complacency through it, that the very argument of pleaſure, which forms generally the greateſt prejudice, againſt religion, proves, when rightly underſtood, the moſt powerful incitement to it.——Which leads me to obſerve,

III. That the wiſdom of a religious conduct may appear from its being the ſure foundation of that peace of mind which is the chief conſtituent of happineſs. The reflection on a life employed in ſerving God, and attending to the proper ends of our being;

ing; a conſciouſneſs of integrity towards him, and the conſequent hopes of an intereſt in his favour, and of an happy immortality when this ſhort and tranſitory ſcene is no more, will be a never-failing ſource of ſatisfaction and delight. Hence ariſe a thouſand ſelf-gratulations.

What Solomon obſerves of Wiſdom, is equally true of peace of mind: *The merchandiſe of it is better than the merchandiſe of ſilver, and the gain thereof, than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compared to her.* But this is a happineſs which Vice muſt ever be a ſtranger to, and none but the virtuous and good ever can enjoy. Avarice cannot find it in wealth, nor Senſuality in vitious gratifications, nor Ambition in honours and diſtinctions; nor is it to be found, but in the reflections of the virtuous mind. The children of this world may ſucceed in the immediate objects of their purſuit; honours, power, or wealth; but cannot obtain happineſs, or peace of mind,—the end for which thoſe objects are purſued. This is a reward which the Author of our being

being confers only on thoſe that obey him, and ſuffers none but the virtuous and religious to poſſeſs.

True it is, that the moſt perfect virtue is not productive of pure, unmixed happineſs. The condition of human life will not permit us to expect a total exemption from evils. Religion will indeed bring with it internal peace of mind, but cannot ſecure us from external contingencies; from fraud, injuſtice, or violence, to which the iniquity of the world will expoſe us; nor from pain, ſorrow, or ſickneſs, to which our frame is by nature ſubject. But though theſe, or other afflictions, may be the lot of the good man; yet his peace of mind will alleviate the weight of thoſe afflictions, and ſupport him under them,—which is next to an exemption from them. Religion will not reverſe the diſtinctions of ſtation which Providence has appointed: it will neither give riches to the poor, nor liberty to the captive; but it will adminiſter conſolation to both; it will teach acquieſcence and contentment; it will teach, that godlineſs is the beſt riches, freedom from ſin the moſt valuable

luable liberty. Religion will not ſecure us from the paſſions of others; but it will protect us from our own; it will humanize the mind, and ſoften it into moderation, and teach all our paſſions a due ſubjection to reaſon and duty.

But further, Religion is not leſs friendly in its influence on ſocial than private life; and is equally conducive to the happineſs of the public, and of individuals. So far, therefore, as every one's happineſs is connected with, and dependent on, that of the public, it becomes his intereſt, and his wiſdom, upon this account, to be religious. It is not in human reaſon to deviſe rules better calculated for the ſecurity, and peace, and happineſs, of ſocial life, than thoſe preſcribed by religion. It forbids all fraud, violence, and oppreſſion; corrects all acrimony of temper, all aſperity of manners; recommends a juſt diſcharge of the duties proper to our reſpective ſtations; bids us regard every man as our brother, equally related to God with ourſelves. It inſtructs us to be liberal to the wants of others, compaſſionate

to their afflictions, to be eaſy to be reconciled, ready to forgive.

All the virtues that can render a people ſecure and flouriſhing, all the duties that the beſt political laws require as neceſſary, or conducive to the public tranquillity, are enjoined by our religion; and all the crimes they forbid, as ſubverſive of public peace and order, are prohibited by it: ſo that the wiſeſt legiſlators bear teſtimony to the wiſdom and excellence of religion; which has this peculiar advantage above all human laws, that whereas their reſtraints can extend only to external behaviour, and bind the hand, religion reaches the heart, regulates its movements, and purifies that ſource and fountain of action.

And were the practice of religion generally to prevail; if all men would act under the influence of its principles, and be ſober, honeſt, temperate, and induſtrious; they would eſcape more than half the evils that afflict mankind. It is eaſy to ſee, that the natural conſequences of ſuch univerſal virtue would preſent to the mind a perfect portrait, a finiſhed image, of public happineſs; an image,

mage, indeed, which the mind may form to itſelf, and contemplate,—but which the corruption of mankind, it is to be feared, will never ſuffer to have more than an ideal, never a real exiſtence. But in whatever proportion, probity, integrity, benevolence, and the reſt of the virtues, prevail in any nation; in the ſame proportion will that nation feel thoſe happy conſequences, which, were mens virtue perfect, would be as perfect happineſs as the condition of mortality will admit.

Lastly, The wiſdom of a religious life may hence appear, becauſe ſuch a conduct is infinitely preferable, infinitely more prudent and ſecure, when we take Futurity into conſideration. It is utterly impoſſible to produce any proof of our non-exiſtence hereafter: and were we capable of conceiving, that the evidence for, or againſt, the certainty of a future ſtate, is not deciſive, and that the arguments on both ſides equiponderate; yet it would be prudent, ſurely, to become adventurers for another world, and provide for the important chance.

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If there be no future account to be given, no exiſtence after death, but all beyond the grave is a land of ſilence and darkneſs, a ſtate of oblivion and inſenſibility, (the utmoſt that vice and libertiniſm can wiſh); yet, even then, the good man will reſt equally with the wicked in that ſtate where all things are alike forgotten; and ſuffers nothing in this life, upon account of his religion, but the want of thoſe pleaſures, which are not to be purchaſed but at the expence of his virtue, his peace of mind, and his Hopes of immortality; thoſe hopes which, were they even deluſive and viſionary, yet are eminently ſubſervient, and eſſential even to our preſent peace: for theſe are the beſt ingredients to ſweeten the bitter cup that the world often adminiſters; from theſe alone can be derived ſupport under adverſities, or ſatisfaction even in enjoyments. If religion ſhould hereafter prove a miſtake, it is a miſtake for which we ſhall not be accountable. Should our hopes prove fallacious, and our faith be all error and deluſion, we cannot be more unhappy than the wicked, when both are to be no more. But

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if our faith and hopes be well grounded, (and we have moſt certainly ſufficient evidence of their truth,) the righteous are then for ever inconceivably bleſſed.

On the other hand, it is not in the power of the wicked man to extinguiſh in himſelf all ideas of God, the judge of the world, and all apprehenſions of a future exiſtence. And when he conſiders it only as poſſible, that, this life ended, he may enter into another more important ſtate of being, for which he has made no proviſion; that there may be a day of judgement, there may be a future tribunal, where he muſt appear, and where he can make no defence; this, this alone, will be ſufficient to draw a black, melancholy veil over all his enjoyments, and open a proſpect full of horror. It is Virtue alone that can look forward into futurity with any degree of confidence or ſatisfaction. Vice is no competitor there, nor ever thinks of laying claim to future rewards: on the contrary, the wicked man muſt be often alarmed with fears and apprehenſions, that as he is by nature accountable, an account muſt one day be given; and that as puniſh-

puniſhment is due, puniſhment may overtake him hereafter.

UPON the whole,—the good man enjoys, generally, ſuperior happineſs in this world, and, in the next, ſtands alone, without any rival, in his hopes and pretenſions. Be it then our care to order our ſteps ſo, that, without turning aſide to the right hand or to the left, we may perſevere in that line of wiſdom to which the wiſe and good Author of our being has directed us; and live ever obedient to Him, whoſe precepts are favours, whoſe reſtrictions are mercies, whoſe laws are the laws of kindneſs,—not mere dictates of will, not the arbitrary mandates of power, —but rules of conduct, reſulting from our nature, and eſſential to our well-being.

The divine laws are the inſtructions of our Creator, the counſels of our ſupreme Parent, pointing out to us the way to felicity. Let us then believe, that he has, with paternal care, conſulted our intereſts in all his inſtructions; and let us ſhew our piety and prudence in our obedience to them. *O how I love thy law!* ſays the Pſalmiſt, convinced of its

its ſupreme excellence: *it is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, haſt made me wiſer than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more underſtanding than my teachers; for thy teſtimonies are my meditation. I am wiſer than the aged, becauſe I keep thy commandments.* Impreſſed with the ſame conviction as the Pſalmiſt, let each of us adopt his language, and concur in the piety of his reſolutions: *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy ſtatutes, and I ſhall keep it unto the end. Give me underſtanding, and I will keep thy law; yea, I will keep it with my whole heart. I will meditate on thy precepts, and have reſpect unto thy ways; I will delight myſelf in thy ſtatutes; I will not forget thy word.*

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SERMON II.

Religious employment of time.

EPHES. v. 15. and part of verſ. 16.

See then that ye walk circumſpectly, not as fools, but as wiſe, redeeming the time.

THIS admonition of the apoſtle is well worthy of the conſideration of mankind in general, as well as of thoſe to whom it was particularly addreſſed. For mankind in general, far from the circumſpection required by the apoſtle, are but too guilty of indifference and inadvertence to religious duties. Religion they are too apt to conſider as a matter of ſlight aud eaſy concern, and to paſs away life in the indolence of ſecurity, and in an inattention which they would think highly criminal where any o-

ther intereſt than that of eternity was at ſtake. The preſent opportunities of inſuring our ſalvation we ſuffer to paſs unregarded by us. Of nothing are we more waſteful than of Time; than which nothing is more valuable. We are always ready to part with it upon cheap and eaſy terms, and to give what we can ſpare from worldy concerns to every one that aſketh. Little of our time, it is to be feared, will turn to account with regard to our future intereſt; much of it is doubtleſs unprofitably, too much perhaps criminally, waſted; in which caſe, both our time and ourſelves are loſt for ever.

Should we ſit down, and take an account of our years, and calculate the expence of our time, and mark its various articles, how little would generally appear at the foot of the account, expended in the true ends of living, or employed in ſuch purpoſes as will be of uſe in the life to come?

The precept in the text, which directs us to walk circumſpectly, and to redeem our time, implies attention in employing the preſent

ſent opportunities of life, and care in correcting the errors of the paſt.

In this diſcourſe, then, I ſhall conſider, 1*ſt*, How attentive we ought to be to employ our preſent time in the duties of Religion; and, 2*dly*, Shall offer ſome admonitions, to aſſiſt in correcting the errors of our former conduct.

I. Let us obſerve how attentive we ought to be to employ our preſent time in the duties of Religion. The importance of this work calls for all the attention we can give it. For what can we conceive of higher importance than the ſalvation of the Soul? This is the one thing, above all other things, needful; in compariſon of which, honours, power, pleaſures, poſſeſſions, every thing that the world has to offer, is of no moment or value. If, then, the ſalvation of our ſouls demands our care; if to attain the favour of Heaven, and an immortality of happineſs, be of importance; if theſe are objects highly conſequential to us, the duties of religion, which are neceſſary to that end,

end, are of equal conſequence, and equally demand our attention.

But important and neceſſary as our attention to the duties of religion muſt appear,—the neceſſity of this attention will be ſtill more apparent, when we conſider the extent and difficulty of the work we have to perform. For it is not ſo eaſy a taſk as ſome may apprehend, faithfully to diſcharge the duties which religion requires, and to walk in all the commandments of God blameleſs: no eaſy taſk rightly to conduct and diſcipline our paſſions; to correct the various diſorders, and wrong propenſities of our nature; to turn the bias of our inclinations from evil to good; to guard our hearts from evil thoughts, and to reſtrain the tongue from uucharitable cenſure; to have a mind equal to every condition; in adverſity to be patient and reſigned, in proſperity to be humble and humane, under provocations to be meek and benevolent; to poſſeſs our ſoul with a due reverence of our Maker; to keep the will in a perfect ſubmiſſion to the will of Heaven; to ſet God always before us; to have our duty always

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in our eye; to keep the ſoul always awake to its ſupreme and immortal intereſts; to oppoſe the ſtream of criminal cuſtom and faſhion; to preſerve an unſpotted purity amidſt the pollutions of the world; not to be tempted by the example or perſuaſion, the friendſhip or reproaches of others; and, in general, to reſtrain all our inclinations and paſſions, our deſires and averſions, within the bounds of duty, to order our ſteps ſteadily in the paths of religion, to improve to the beſt advantage every talent entruſted to our care, and to prepare ourſelves to be fit inhabitants of that holy place where nothing impure can enter.

And as the taſk is arduous and important, ſo the time to perform it is but ſhort. How inconſiderable is the natural term of human life, even in its utmoſt extent! and how is this ſcanty meaſure of our years ſtill further abridged, by various cauſes! Part of life paſſes away before the dawn of Reaſon gives us a diſcernment of good and evil; and a great part of it is elapſed before we arrive at any maturity of underſtanding. If to this we add the infirmities and diſorders

that

that uſually attend and cloud the evening of life, how ſhort then is the intermediate day for the moral culture of the ſoul? Eſpecially when we further reflect, that the demands of our reſpective ſtations, and the unavoidable cares of the world, conſume a large portion of it. And if to theſe neceſſary deductions, we add the caſual ones that we muſt all inevitably meet with; it will appear what a ſmall part of our abode here we have to beſtow on the moral improvement of the mind, the care of the ſoul, or the concernments of a future exiſtence.

If thus contracted, then, is the whole term allotted us for gaining or loſing an happy immortality; if buſineſs of ſuch importance is to be tranſacted and executed in ſo ſhort a ſpace;—what attention, what circumſpection, what good huſbandry, muſt be requiſite to the prudent employment of it? This conſideration, of the ſhortneſs of our time, ſhould be a powerful inducement to apply, without delay, to the great work and buſineſs of life, and diſpatch it with becoming diligence; leſt, by neglecting or deferring it, our lives may draw to an end before

before the great work of life be finiſhed, perhaps indeed before it is begun, and we may be hurried out of this world before we have made proviſion for the next.

Of high concern, therefore, it is, not to ſpend our hours in vanity; not to ſuffer our time to paſs without improvement; not to live a day in vain, nor to defer till to-morrow, or to any ſuppoſed hereafter, the duty that ought to be done at preſent. For this ſuppoſed hereafter may perhaps never be in our poſſeſſion. We know not whether to-morrow may be ours; for ſhort as Nature has made our term of life, it is often rendered ſtill ſhorter by various unforeſeen and unavoidable Contingencies. Expoſed always to a thouſand accidents, we know not what a day, or an hour, may bring forth. Life is held by ſo uncertain a tenure, that in the midſt of it we are ſaid to be in death. No time but the preſent, therefore, we can conſider as our own. The time that is paſt was ours indeed; and as we employed it well or ill, will accordingly be placed to our account. The time that is future, we cannot reckon upon;

upon; it may, or may not, be ours. We are ſecure of nothing but the preſent; and no portion of time beyond the preſent may poſſibly be granted us. The preſent time, therefore, we ſhould ſeize, and improve to the beſt purpoſes, and make that our own, by virtue and wiſdom, which, when once paſt, can never be recalled. If we loſe the preſent, we loſe all that is, all that perhaps ever may be ours. It is the immediate buſineſs of to-day, to ſerve God, and to be uſeful, and do good to our fellow-creatures. Let us not then poſtpone till to morrow the immediate and proper buſineſs and duty of to-day.

Having thus conſidered how attentive we ought to be to employ the preſent time in the duties of Religion, I ſhall proceed,

II. To offer ſome admonitions to aſſiſt us in redeeming the time that is paſt.

Time is indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, irrecoverable; the hours that are fled cannot be recalled; and time, in a literal ſenſe, cannot be regained or redeemed: but in a moral ſenſe, it may, by carefully recollecting the

the conduct of former years; reviewing the volume of our paſt life, peruſing with an attentive eye its various paſſages, and correcting and amending its numerous errors. To this end, a careful retroſpect is requiſite, in order to obſerve in what manner we have performed the duties we owe to God and our fellow-creatures; whether there be any ſin which we have not duly repented of, and for which we have not implored the divine forgiveneſs; whether there be any injury done to our neighbour, for which we have not made ſufficient reparation; whether our gratitude to the Divine Being has been ſuited to the bleſſings we have received from him; and whether the good or kind offices we have done to others were proportioned to our ability of doing them. We ſhould obſerve in what duties we have been moſt defective; what temptations have generally prevailed, what virtues have been weakeſt, what paſſions moſt irregular. By thus inquiring into the diſorders of the ſoul, we ſhall be beſt able to apply proper remedies, and rectify whatever we find amiſs.

It might be particularly uſeful to look back on our tranſgreſſions, and the ſeducements by which we were tempted. If, in compliance with temptation, we have at any time forgotten what we owe to God, and have departed from our duty, let us recollect what degree of happineſs we acquired by ſuch tranſgreſſions, and what compenſation they have made us for the loſs of our integrity, for the loſs, perhaps, of our peace of mind, and for the loſs of the approbation and countenance of Heaven. Was Intereſt the temptation? let us make a fair eſtimate of our profit, and compute how much ſatisfaction we have received from diſhoneſt gain; from adding houſe to houſe, or field to field. Has it made any addition to our peace of mind? Has it not rather been the perpetual occaſion of painful recollections? and is there not, upon the whole, a large balance of miſery againſt us? Or was pleaſure the ſeducement? Was it not fallacious? Did it not fall far ſhort of what our hopes had promiſed? And what of it now remains, but the regret of having purſued it, and the bitter

bitter remembrance of its guilt? If we thus reflect upon the unhappy conſequences of former tranſgreſſions, we ſhall be leſs inclined to yield to future temptations, knowing that they terminate in ſorrow and remorſe. And thus we may be ſaid to redeem the paſt time, by reviewing and correcting the errors of our former conduct, and repairing the damages we have received from it.

Let us then ſeriouſly conſider, that the future ſtate and condition of our being for eternal ages depends upon our preſent conduct and behaviour; and that the prize of immortal happineſs is not to be obtained, but by a religious employment of the ſhort and uncertain term of years allotted us in this life. How vigilant and careful, then, ought we to be to provide for the great end of our being, the ſalvation of our ſouls, by a wiſe employment of the preſent time, and by retrieving the miſcarriages of the paſt!

But here I would obſerve, that to the religious employment of our time, it is not neceſſary that it ſhould be all devoted to the more

more immediate duties of religion. It is not neceſſary that we ſhould be always on our knees, or have always our eyes or hearts elevated towards heaven. This our condition in the world will not admit. But we employ our time well, when we divide it between the concerns of this life, and thoſe of the next; when we attend to the duties of our reſpective ſtations and employments, and in our intercourſe with the world act always with juſtice, uprightneſs, and integrity; when we decline all opportunities of returning ill offices, and lay hold on every occaſion of doing a kind one; when we let temperance govern our appetites, and meekneſs moderate our paſſions; when we begin and cloſe the day with adoring our Creator, who made both it and us,—and with intreating his forgiveneſs, protection, and aſſiſtance; and on days ſet apart for the ſolemn worſhip of the Almighty, when we make his more immediate ſervice our employment, and retire from all other cares, to that which is moſt needful, the care of our Souls. This is to employ our time religiouſly; and by thus employing it, we ſhall avoid that compunction

punction and regret which the dying ſinner feels, when he looks back on the years he has waſted in folly, and wiſhes in vain to recall the hours that are fled; we ſhall neither neglect the concerns of this world, nor thoſe of the next; we ſhall perform the duties required from us here, and ſhall prepare our ſouls for that immortal ſtate of felicity into which we hope finally to enter.

SER-

SERMON III.

Error of conforming to faſhionable vices.

ROM. xii. 2.

Be not conformed to this world.

THE corruption and degeneracy of human nature has been the common and juſt ſubject of virtuous complaint in every age. And the ſcripture, conformably to the general ſentiments of mankind, repreſents the world as in a ſtate of depravation, degenerated from its original purity,—as a corrupt and corrupting ſcene, where all our attention and vigilance will be required to guard againſt the contagion of its vices, and where perſuaſions and examples will be always ſoliciting our compliance with prevailing manners.

Amidſt

Amidſt theſe dangers, and this prevalence of vice, it may be proper to attend to the fatal Conſequences of conforming to the corrupt manners and vices of the world.

I. When virtue is neglected,—diſregarded by the many, and diſcountenanced by the great; when the public manners are corrupt, and vice has the authority of numbers on its ſide; we are often weak enough to comply with the ſeducements of example, and to fall in with the common degeneracy. We cannot but obſerve how powerful and univerſal is the influence and authority of faſhion, or popular example; with what paſſive ſubmiſſion we obey its guidance; how ſoon we become voluntary ſlaves, and reſign our manners, our ſentiments, and modes of living, to its dominion. Even our religious opinions, and our moral deportment, we are apt to form, as we do our language, by imitation, and pay a more prompt obedience to the dictates of faſhion, cuſtom, and example, than to the laws of reaſon, conſcience, and duty; and often act as if we had no reaſon, judgement, or conſcience,

ſcience, to be our guide, but were implicitly led, and, as it were, mechanically impelled and directed, by the ſentiments and manners of the world. With a great part of mankind, with the vulgar at leaſt of every rank, faſhion and example ſhould ſeem to ſupply the place of reaſon and reflection.

But powerful as the influence of public manners may be, it cannot vindicate or excuſe criminal compliances. For right and wrong, moral good and evil, are founded, not on the capricious rules of faſhion or cuſtom, not on the fluctuating opinions of the world, not on the variable inſtitutions of human appointment, but have a certain, permanent, invariable eſtabliſhment in Nature. Our Creator, when he gave us our being, gave us an immutable law for our conduct, from which no opinions or cuſtoms, no power, can authoriſe us to depart. Sooner ſhall heaven and earth paſs away, than the leaſt part of that law be antiquated or repealed.

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upon the heart. He has taught us, by our moral feelings, by the dictates of reaſon, as well as by the precepts of revelation, our duties to him, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourſelves; duties ſo clearly revealed, that whenever we reflect on our conduct, ſuch reflection is invariably attended with a ſenſe and conſciouſneſs of the rectitude or iniquity of our actions, and of their diſagreement or conformity to the law of reaſon. The law of reaſon is the primary, the eternal, and immutable law of morality; it is the law of every intellectual being; it is the law of man, and it is the law of God; a law which he himſelf ever invariably obſerves, and the violation of which he muſt ever diſapprove in his creatures. And this law comes further recommended and enforced by the law of revelation.

If, then, this law has a firm and immoveable foundation in nature, and in the goſpel; if our obligation, conſequently, to moral duties, be indiſpenſable and immutable; how evident an error is it to pay more regard to the manners and example of the world, than to the monitions of reaſon and

and conſcience? What an indignity to the Sovereign of the univerſe, to forſake his eternal laws of righteouſneſs, preſcribed by unerring wiſdom, in order to comply with human corruptions and faſhionable modes of vice? Let us not preſume, that the Judge of all the earth will grant an idulgence to any ſpecies of ſin, merely becauſe it is general and prevailing, or that the multitude of offenders will ſcreen any individual from the inflictions of juſtice. For our Saviour has informed us, that *wide is the gate, and broad the way, that leads to deſtruction, and that many there be which go in thereat; and that ſtrait is the gate, and narrow the way, that leadeth unto life, and that few there be that find it.*

When God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man was great, and that all fleſh had corrupted his way upon earth, he ſent, we know, a general deluge, to exterminate the inhabitants of the earth, and to tranſmit to future generations a laſting and awful memorial of his juſtice and reſentment againſt ſin, however univerſal and prevailing. In human governments, indeed, particular criminals

minals may eſcape, and multitudes may be pardoned for the ſake of expediency; but ſuch a conduct can have no place under the Divine adminiſtration. The perfections of the divine nature render it equally impoſſible that any tranſgreſſor ſhould eſcape his eye, or that any inconvenience ſhould enſue from the puniſhment of multitudes. If the whole world were by his ſentence at once doomed to immediate annihilation, and the whole human race extirpated, he can call other worlds, worlds without number, into being.

The conſequences of ſin muſt therefore prove inevitably fatal to the ſinner, in this life, or a future. For if there be a God who ſuperintends and governs the world, and who made us moral and accountable beings, it muſt be a proper act of his government, to bring every individual to judgement. The rectitude of the divine nature will manifeſt his approbation of virtue, and his averſion to ſin, by rendering to every man according to his deeds, and regulating his diſtributions of happineſs or miſery to his creatures, by the reſpective degrees of virtue

virtue or vice in their conduct and behaviour. It conſiſts not with the majeſty or wiſdom of the ſupreme Lawgiver to give us laws, without requiring obedience to thoſe laws; nor can his juſtice ſuffer them to be violated with impunity.

We are apt indeed to reſt our hopes, ſecurely, as we think, on the divine mercy and goodneſs. The mercy of our Creator is an object that agreeably flatters our wiſhes, cheriſhes our hopes, and ſpeaks peace to the ſoul; and we have a pleaſure, therefore, in indulging all ſuch ſentiments as repreſent his mercy like the ſun, univerſal in its influence, riſing upon the evil and the good, upon the juſt and the unjuſt. God is indeed abundant in goodneſs, and his mercy is over all his works. Numberleſs inſtances we may obſerve of his goodneſs and beneficence to his creatures, few of his ſeverity and reſentment. His judgements deſcend ſlowly upon the worſt of ſinners; and even then are tempered with mercy. He is as merciful as is conſiſtent with the purity of his nature, or with the honour of his laws; but as his power extends not to impoſſibilities,

ties, but to the proper objects of power; ſo his mercy is limited to the penitent, the only fit objects of mercy. As a father pitieth his own children, ſo is the Lord merciful; but it is to them that fear him. His goodneſs does not expreſs itſelf in arbitrary grants of pardon to the perſevering offender, but always delights to meet and receive the returning penitent. He propoſes to make us happy by piety and virtue, not without them; by offering the privileges and bleſſings of the Chriſtian inſtitution, but not by diſpenſing with its laws. While we remember his mercy, therefore, let us not forget, that juſtice and holineſs are attributes equally eſſential to him.

The providence of God, we may in many inſtances obſerve, permits, in this world, the beſt and moſt faithful of his ſervants to be involved in various misfortunes, to ſuffer numerous afflictions, and on ſome occaſions the ſevereſt tortures. Can we then think, that the Judge of all the earth will permit the wicked, thoſe who have rejected his authority, thoſe who muſt be objects of his diſpleaſure, to eſcape, here or hereafter, with

with leſs ſevere ſufferings, than thoſe to which even the virtuous and good, who are undoubtedly objects of favour, are ſometimes expoſed in this life? The evils we now ſee and feel are ſtrong intimations of the poſſibility of ſtill greater evils in futurity, and of their conſiſtency with the divine mercy and goodneſs.

If, then, ſin moſt aſſuredly bringeth forth death; if it is pregnant with miſery, and its conſequences muſt prove inevitably fatal to every perſevering ſinner;—let it be our determined purpoſe, not to pay ſuch homage to the public opinion, as to live more in ſubjection to it, than to the convictions of reaſon and conſcience. The point to be attended to is, not what conduct may be applauded by others, but what is right, what becomes us as men and as Chriſtians; not what the manners of the world may recommend, not what cuſtom and faſhion preſcribe, but what the laws of God, what conſcience and duty ſay. In our own breaſt ſits the monitor, whoſe ſentiments we are above all things to regard. To that monitor,

tor, the faithful friend to our happineſs, let us ever pay more deference than to prevailing manners or opinions, and prefer the juſt approbation of our own heart to all other applauſe.

If our principles and manners are to be formed and regulated by the example of the world, we may indeed, in ſome inſtances, poſſibly act right: but we muſt aſſume different characters; our manners muſt fluctuate with the manners of the world; and we muſt comply with every varying mode of virtue or vice, to which the accidental faſhion of the day may give a temporary ſanction. How much ſuperior he, who, however ſingular, adheres invariably to the line of duty, uniformly acts the part his heart dictates, ſcorns any compliances which differ from it, and deſpiſes that approbation which is not to be acquired, but at the expence of being unfaithful to his God, and unjuſt to himſelf?

Let not, then, either example or perſuaſion, or the fear of cenſure, or the reproach of ſingularity, prevail with us to conform to the corruptions of the world. Let us not be

be timid in virtue, and audacious in vice; fearing the cenſure of the world, which we might ſecurely diſregard; diſregarding the diſpleaſure of Heaven, which we ought above all things to fear. Let it be our principal care, to keep our eye attentively fixed upon the laws of religion, as the rule and guide of our conduct; and if we find, that by complying with the manners of the world, we have deviated from thoſe laws, and loſt ſight of our duty, and ſuffered ourſelves to be carried down with the ſtream of any prevailing vice, let us exert our beſt efforts to ſtem the torrent, and return to that point of duty from which we had departed.

It is indeed with reluctance we are prevailed on to diſengage ourſelves from vices, errors, or follies, which we have once adopted, and to which we have adhered; becauſe this cannot be done without a humiliating circumſtance; without the ſhame of making acknowledgements, to which the natural pride of mankind makes it painful to ſubmit. But let no one offer ſuch an indignity to God, or to his own underſtanding, as to be more afraid of the ſhame of acknowledging

a wrong practice, than of the guilt of perſevering in it. However painful it may be to Pride, nothing can appear of more eaſy vindication in the eye of reaſon, nothing more praiſe-worthy in the ſight of Heaven, than to go off from error, and guilt, and folly, as ſoon as they are diſcovered, and to ſuffer no wrong prepoſſeſſions, no favourite attachments, no perſuaſion, however artful, no authority, however powerful, and no example or cuſtom, however general and prevailing, to enſlave the mind, and detain it from following whitherſoever reaſon, truth, and duty, point the way.

For better it is to weigh every action in the balance of truth and reaſon, than in the ſcale of popular opinion; better to retire alone to the narrow, unfrequented, but ſecure, walk of virtue, than to go along with the multitude in the broad way that leadeth to deſtruction; better to hazard the reproaches that may attend a virtuous ſingularity, which will hereafter be followed with laſting honours, than to comply with vices and follies to which the caprice of Faſhion may have lent a ſhort-lived reputation. Let

us

us remember, that to hold faſt our integrity amidſt a general corruption, to be ſingular in goodneſs amidſt public degeneracy, argues the higheſt moral worth and excellence, and will in a peculiar manner point out and recommend us to the favourable regard of that Being whoſe delight is in the ſaints that are upon the earth, and upon ſuch as excel in virtue.

SER-

SERMON IV.

On Conſcience.

JOB xxvii. 6.

My heart ſhall not reproach me ſo long as I live.

WE are by nature formed with a power or faculty which furniſhes us with ſuch impreſſions or ſentiments of moral good and evil, that we neceſſarily give our approbation to the one, and with-hold it from the other. A ſenſe of virtue and vice is ſo cloſely interwoven in our frame and texture, that our being muſt be extinguiſhed, before that ſenſe can be totally loſt. It is this principle, this internal ſenſe, to which Job in the text expreſſes his regard, and in conformity to which he determines

to

to act: *My heart ſhall not reproach me ſo long as I live.*

In conſidering which words, I ſhall obſerve, 1*ſt*, The nature and office of that principle in us which is here ſtyled *the heart*; 2*dly*, What conduct will ſecure to us its approbation; and, *laſtly*, The happineſs reſulting from ſuch a conduct.

I. By *the heart* is here meant that moral principle, diſtinguiſhed generally by the name of *conſcience*, which points out the diſtinctions of good and evil, and exhibits to our view the law of our nature, in all the important branches of it, in plain and intelligible characters. It gives us a quick and immediate perception of our duty, and of the rectitude or iniquity of our conduct, without the trouble of deep reſearches, or laboured diſquiſitions; approves and prompts us to good actions; diſapproves and diſſuades from others.

That there is ſuch a moral faculty, or directing principle, within us, is evident beyond a queſtion. Every man muſt be conſcious, not only of a power common to him with

with the inferior creation, of complying with the ſolicitations of paſſion or appetite, but alſo of a ſuperior faculty or power, not poſſeſſed by other creatures, that of ſuppreſſing the inclinations of a hurtful appetite, of oppoſing the impulſes of a wrong paſſion, and of forming and regulating his whole conduct by certain laws. Every action is accompanied with a certain conſciouſneſs of right or wrong, whereby we become ſelf-approved, or ſelf-reproached.

This moral principle ſeems deſigned by the Author of our being to be to the mind what the eye is to the body; and it is its office to direct us in the way in which we ſhould walk; to admoniſh us of every deviation from it; and to bring us back, whenever we turn aſide to the right hand, or to the left. It juſtifies, and applauds, when we do right; reproaches, and condemns, when we act amiſs; and give ſecret intimations, that we ſhall accordingly be juſtified or condemned, at a future tribunal, where we muſt all one day appear.

This principle is indeed, in particular perſons, more or leſs active and vigorous, according

cording as they have eſtabliſhed, or reduced, its influence, by an habitual attention to its admonitions, or by conſtant efforts to ſilence and ſuppreſs them. If we attend to its ſuggeſtions, and follow it as the guide of life, it will lead us on to piety and virtue; if we endeavour to oppoſe, or evade, its counſels, its power may be gradually diminiſhed, but never totally loſt. There are ſeaſons in which this principle, in ſpite of all arts and efforts to ſuppreſs it, will recover its power; as when the paſſions have been broken and ſubdued by adverſity, and are ſucceeded by ſerious reflections. Conſcience will then reſume its authority, and execute its office, in laying the obligations of duty before us, and in ſevere accuſations and reproaches for having departed from them.

Having thus conſidered the nature of the moral principle in us which in the text is ſtyled the *heart*, let us,

II. OBSERVE what conduct will ſecure to us its approbation.

In order to this, it is neceſſary that it obtain the ſupremacy of the mind, and preſide over

over all inferior principles, and regulate and govern every propenſion and affection of our nature, without being itſelf controuled or influenced by them. We ſhould reverence it as the oracle of God, the faithful interpreter of his will, and give a conſtant attention to it, and form our whole conduct by its counſels. In all important points of duty, its deciſions will be generally clear; and in particular dubious caſes, where it may not be eaſy to decide upon the lawfulneſs or unlawfulneſs of an action, it ought to be a ſacred maxim with us, to adhere to that ſide of the queſtion where our integrity will be moſt ſecure, and not to endanger it by too near approaches to ſin. Such approaches lead naturally to known and avowed iniquity; for he who can allow himſelf to hazard an action, the lawfulneſs of which is not apparent, and the unlawfulneſs ſuſpected, betrays a propenſity which will not permit him long to heſiate at the commiſſion of evident and undiſputed crimes.

But, further, to ſecure the approbation of our heart, we muſt not only religiouſly follow its guidance, and obſerve its dictates,

but it is neceſſary alſo to acquire a juſt information in our duty, and to acquaint ourſelves with its obligations. For conſcience itſelf may be erroneous, and hold out falſe lights; and then, however faithfully we purſue its directions, this will not always inſure our innocence. St Paul ſtyles himſelf the leaſt of the apoſtles, not meet to be called an apoſtle, and the chief of ſinners, becauſe he perſecuted the church of Chriſt,—though as he himſelf informs us, he did it in ignorance. Though we ought to act agreeably to our convictions, in complying with the dictates of an erroneous conſcience, and it would be highly culpable in us to diſregard them whilſt we believed them to be right; yet if ſuch were not inevitable errors, but the effects of voluntary corruption or negligence, they muſt ſubject us to the imputation of guilt, and conſequently to the reproaches of our own mind, as ſoon as light enough is let in upon it, to give it a juſt diſcernment of its errors, and of the criminal occaſions of them.

If, therefore, we would ſecure the approbation of our heart, it muſt be our equal care

to

to inform ourſelves of our duty, and to live up to our information.

III. Let us, laſtly, conſider the happineſs reſulting from ſuch a conduct.

1ſt, The teſtimony of the heart in our favour is a ſecret intimation, ſuggeſted by Nature, that the Judge of the whole earth will concur with ſuch teſtimony, and affirm the judgement which our heart has formed. *If our heart condemn us not we may have confidence towards God.* For virtue and vice, good and evil, muſt appear to be ſuch, to God as well as to men; with this difference, that his ſupreme wiſdom always beholds the reality of things with an unerring eye, and with infallible certainty ſees them to be what they are; whilſt our imperfect ſight is often deceived by appearances and illuſions, and betrayed into various errors. Paſſions and prejudices may corrupt our underſtanding, and extort a partial judgement. The moſt iniquitous may give themſelves a falſe applauſe for weak or ſuperſtitious ſervices; and, on the other hand, the moſt virtuous and pious minds may be ſometimes alarmed with

with terrors and deſpondencies that are viſionary and groundleſs.

But in ſuch caſes, Reaſon is not conſulted, but neglected; our judgement is not the judgement of our reaſon, but of our paſſions; it is not Reaſon which acquits or condemns; it is Fear, Ignorance, Superſtition, or Melancholy, which uſurp its place. Conſcience forms its judgement by comparing our conduct with the law of our duty; but ſuperſtitious imaginations and melancholy fears have no rule of judgement; and often determine againſt the moſt evident rules, both of reaſon and revelation. But where Reaſon's voice is heard, and no paſſions or prepoſſeſſions permitted to overrule its authority; where the mind has duly conſidered and examined our conduct by the laws of God, and pronounces a deliberate, uninfluenced ſentence; this ſentence, we have the beſt grounds to believe, will be affirmed at the heavenly tribunal; and may encourage us to look up with confidence to our Supreme Judge, in juſt expectation of his approbation and favour.

But, further, the approbation of our heart

heart not only opens to us the proſpect of a diſtant felicity, and gives us an aſſurance of the future favour of Heaven, but alſo diffuſes through the mind a preſent ſerenity and ſatisfaction. The Author of our being has appointed internal peace and tranquillity to be the immediate reward of obedience to the laws of our nature. And a reward it is that well deſerves our attention. This is the ſtate to which Philoſophy pretended to conduct her followers, as the ſummit of human enjoyment, the neareſt approach to happineſs we can make in this life. But to this ſtate Religion will moſt effectually lead us, and to theſe paths of peace will be our beſt and ſureſt guide.

Nothing can be more pleaſurable to the mind, than to reflect, that our conduct has been ſuch as reaſon and conſcience have dictated and approved; that we have acted in conformity to the laws of our Maker, and have lived up to the deſign of our creation. If, upon a juſt ſcrutiny into our actions, we find, that, as far as human infirmity permits, we have endeavoured to be faithful in our duty to God, and to pay that reverence

reverence and ſubmiſſion, which are due from all intellectual beings to the Father of the univerſe; if we find, that integrity, equity, fidelity, and benevolence, have been the rules of our behaviour to our fellow-creatures, and that our paſſions have been, if not always, yet generally, under due government;—if ſuch is the reſult of our inquiry, we need not labour to work in ourſelves a conviction that we have acted right; for peace and complacency will ſpontaneouſly ſpring up from it. Our nature is ſo framed and conſtituted, that it is impoſſible not to receive ſelf-gratulations from the conſciouſneſs of ſuch behaviour.

This conſciouſneſs affords a moſt laſting and ſecure ſatisfaction; which is not, like other pleaſures, limited to certain ſeaſons or conjunctures; does not change with circumſtances, nor ſatiate with repetition, nor grow old with time; but continues as long as the conſciouſneſs that gave it birth; and has this peculiar advantage, that it may be enjoyed in its higheſt perfection, when we can enjoy nothing elſe,—when the body ſickens, and its ſenſes languiſh and decay.

Which

Which leads me to obſerve, laſtly, That the ſatisfaction of a ſelf-approving heart is moſt ſenſibly felt, at the moſt awful period of our lives, at a juncture when all other pleaſures forſake us,—at the approach of our diſſolution.

If in that ſituation we can recall the tranſactions of former days, and of the years that are paſt, and ſuffer them to appear in review before us, and can obſerve, that our deportment has, upon the whole, been formed and regulated by the monitions of conſcience; that no corrupt paſſions have been more attended to than its counſels; that our habitual care has been to know and do the will of our Maker, to conſult his honour, the good of our fellow-creatures, and our own eternal felicity; that whatever particular failings and infirmites we may have been ſubject to, yet that the general and uniform courſe of our life has been conducted with uprightneſs and integrity; — we muſt doubtleſs receive a peculiar ſatisfaction, a deep-felt joy, a joy which cannot be deſcribed, and which the heart of the virtuous and good alone can conceive. We ſhall not then

then be afraid to encounter the laſt enemy of our nature, death, which will be diſarmed of its terrors, and no longer formidable. The grave we ſhall conſider as the gate to immortality, as introductory to that ſtate where conſcious integrity gives the beſt-grounded hopes of the approbation and favour of our Maker.

And what can our conceptions form to us more deſirable, than to have conſolation adminſtered in that hour of diſtreſs, when nature moſt needs it? to have ſecret infuſions of joy poured in upon the ſoul, and to have relief ſupplied from within, when all outward aſſiſtance is vain? How inexpreſſible muſt be the ſatisfaction, to have no guilty fears at that time to fix a ſting in our boſom! to have the pains of diſeaſe mitigated by an internal compoſure! to be able to look back upon this world without remorſe, and into the next without terror! to have confidence towards God, a confidence that that all gracious Being, whoſe laws it has been our habitual care to obey, whoſe favour has been our firſt object, is about to reward our obedience with joys unſpeakable

and

and full of glory; and that he who has been our patron and protector in life, will be our guide and guardian through the vale of death, and an inſeperable Friend and Father to us in our journey through eternity!

Who then would not wiſh to live the life of the righteous, that his laſt end may be like his; perplexed by no unrepented ſins, diſturbed by no painful reproaches, diſtracted by no guilty apprehenſions; but ſupported by conſcious goodneſs, by hopes full of immortality, and by ſuch anticipations of the heavenly felicity, as are next to the poſſeſſion of it?

FROM what has been offered, it may appear, that the moral principle which we call *conſcience*, and is in the text ſtyled *the heart*, was given us to be the guide of our conduct, and to lead us to an obedience to the laws of God, with which our own happineſs is inſeparably connected. Be it then our firſt and principal care, to be ever attentive to the friendly voice of this domeſtic guide, this faithful monitor within us. Let it be our equal endeavour to inform ourſelves of the

duties required from us, and to live ſuitably to our informations. Such a conduct will ſecure to us the approbation of our heart; will diffuſe a laſting ſerenity through our whole life; will ſupply us with the happieſt conſolations at the hour of death; will recommend us to the approbation of the Divine Being; and will procure the moſt ineſtimable of all bleſſings, a gracious ſentence at the final judgement.

SER-

SERMON V.

Houſe of mourning.

ECCLES. vii. 4.

The heart of the wiſe is in the houſe of mourning.

THis is the ſentiment of one of the wiſeſt and greateſt of the ſons of men; one who, to ſuperior abilities of mind, added the moſt ample poſſeſſions of fortune; one who had all the pleaſures of the world at his command, and of all had made the fulleſt experience. *Whatever mine eyes deſired*, ſays he, *I kept not from them; I with held not my heart from any joy, till I might ſee what was that good for the ſons of men which they ſhould do under heaven all the days of their life.* The reſult of his various

rious experiments and inquiries after happineſs was, that riches, honour, power, pleaſure, every thing was vain, but Religion and Virtue. At his firſt ſetting out in the world, he was inclined to ſearch for happineſs, where appearances moſt promiſe it, in ſcenes of mirth and feſtivity. He ſaid in his heart, *Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleaſure.* But further obſervation and experience taught him, that *ſorrow was better than laughter;* i. e. that it is fitter for creatures in ſuch a ſituation as we are here, to be ſerious and conſiderate, than diſſipated and mirthful; that the former diſpoſition is better ſuited to our preſent ſtate, and more conducive to our future felicity, than the latter. Upon this account he determines, that *the heart of the wiſe is in the houſe of mourning, and the heart of fools in the houſe of mirth;* i. e. that more valuable and laſting advantages may be derived from attending to ſcenes of ſorrow and adverſity, than from a life devoted to diſſipation and pleaſure.

Let us, then, conſider this deciſion, and inquire

inquire into the reaſons of the preference given by the Royal Preacher to the former.

THE natural inclinations of mankind, indeed, plead ſtrongly in favour of pleaſure; but however inviting the proſpect, however flattering the idea, they who make pleaſure their ſole object, will ſeldom fail to find, that the diſappointment of their hopes will lead them at laſt to the concluſion of Solomon, that *all is vanity*. The perpetual unremitting purſuit of pleaſure has, beſides, a tendency almoſt imperceptibly to ſeduce, and to lead the mind gradually aſtray from what ought to be its firſt and principal object. Religion, it is true, was not meant to afflict or oppreſs, but to render mankind univerſally as happy as the ſtate of the world will permit; and it has iſſued out no prohibitions againſt innocent pleaſures, which are far from being incompatible with a proper regard to Duty. But it ought to be conſidered, that pleaſures, when ſo far indulged, as to be admitted to take poſſeſſion of the whole heart, to exclude an intermixture of ſerious ſentiments, and leave no

room

room for hours of religious and virtuous reflection, though not criminal in themſelves, lead often to unhappy conſequences.

On this account, adverſity has ever been reputed the ſchool in which are given the beſt inſtructions in wiſdom; in which few are made worſe, many become wiſer and better. On the contrary, how few are reformed or improved, what numbers are ſeduced and corrupted, by the leſſons of proſperity! Of the danger of which, even to the wiſeſt and beſt, the Pſalmiſt was himſelf an eminent inſtance. He who could ſo well inſtruct others concerning the uncertainty and vanity of the world and its enjoyments, yet in his proſperity could not only indulge the vaineſt of thoughts, and ſay, he ſhould never be removed, but was tempted alſo to perpetrate the worſt of crimes. But in his adverſity, how does he reproach hemſelf for the guilt of his pleaſurable hours, and acknowledge, that it was good for him that he had been in trouble, and that God of very faithfulneſs had cauſed him to be troubled! for *before I was afflicted,*

flicted, ſays he, *I went wrong; but now I have kept thy word.*

In a round of pleaſures, we are apt to become too unmindful of what we owe to God, and too neglectful of the debts of mercy due to our ſuffering brethren. Pleaſure and proſperity are fatal ſeducers; and, when we give ear to their counſels, lead to ſuch a train of diſſipations, ſuch a ſucceſſion of follies and vices, that it has been juſtly obſerved, that the greateſt misfortune which can befal us, is, never to meet misfortune. We have reaſon, then, to adore the wiſdom of Providence, that has appointed all the viciſſitudes to which we are ſubject, that has chequered human life with good and evil, and has planned out a ſucceſſion of various cares and troubles, for beings who are little capable of ſupporting, in a rational manner, a ſtate of total pleaſure and proſperity.

On this account it is, that Solomon determines the preference in favour of the houſe of mourning; for there the heart is made better,—there it becomes more ſerious, more ſuſceptive of every tender, every religious impreſſion. How mild, and candid,

candid, and reaſonable, may we obſerve mankind, how open to virtuous reflection, how diſpoſed to ſentiments of benevolence and compaſſion, whilſt they are feeling their own, or the afflictions of others! But how inattentive often, and how inſenſible, to others' ſufferings, when in the midſt of proſperity, and in full purſuit of pleaſure!

Too ſeldom do They, who, amidſt eaſe, affluence, and indulgence, with-hold not their heart from any joy; too, too ſeldom do they reflect, how many unhappy beings are wearing out life amidſt the difficulties and labours of poverty, or the pangs and tortures of diſeaſe, whilſt they beſtow not perhaps the ſmalleſt portion of their abundance to alleviate the ſufferings of their poſſibly not leſs deſerving, but more unfortunate Brethren!

But, on the other hand, ſcenes of adverſity awaken our compaſſion, correct that levity which is the inlet to vice, form us to conſideration, ſoften the heart, and give us a taſte for the ſerious pleaſures of Benevolence and Humanity. By being acquainted with grief, we learn to feel for the unhappy; we

we learn, that a pleaſurable indulgence of ourſelves, and an inſenſibility to the ſufferings of others, are by no means ſuited to ſuch a ſtate of things as is here before us; and that every tender regard is due to the numerous wants and ſorrows of the afflicted.

Would we permit ourſelves to view the world in a true light,—in the light in which, not only as good Chriſtians, but as wiſe men, we ought,—we ſhould learn, that it was not deſigned merely for the purpoſes of feſtivity and entertainment; and that Providence never meant to place us in it, as he did the leviathan in the waters, only to take our paſtime therein. The world is to be conſidered as a ſchool of diſcipline and inſtruction, (to ſome a ſevere one), intended to train and educate us for a future, better, and more permanent ſtate. Fain would we, indeed, have it to be a ſcene of enjoyment, a region of mirth and pleaſure; but experience tells us, that it is to many a vale of tears; to the moſt fortunate, a chequered ſcene of good and evil; and that none of us can, nor, we may preſume, is it fit we ſhould,

enjoy any conſiderable portion of felicity upon earth. It would incline us to think it good for us to be here; would withdraw our attention and affections too much from the next world, and too much attach them to the preſent.

The infinitely wiſe Creator of the world has appointed us to be born to trouble; has intermingled afflictions with every ſtage and ſtation of life; has decreed pleaſure and pain, like day and night, to ſucceed each other in conſtant rotation, with a view, it ſhould ſeem, to intimate, that he reſerves our enjoyment of complete Fulneſs of felicity to another ſtate; and that here our principal cares ſhould be employed in endeavouring to render ourſelves worthy of happineſs, by our endeavours to impart it, by miniſtering to the wants, healing the ſorrows, alleviating and ſoftening, as much as may be, the pains and ſufferings of the afflicted.

WHAT then ſhall we determine ought to be the object of our choice, and which is, upon the whole, the preferable purſuit? Shall

Shall we, regardleſs of other conſiderations, frequent only the houſe of mirth, give our whole attention to the enjoyments of life, and to a ſelfiſh purſuit of pleaſure? or ſhall we, wiſely conſiderate, extend our views beyond ourſelves? Shall we open our hearts to our fellow-beings? Shall we ſometimes viſit the houſe of Mourning, and attend with humanity to the complaints of ſorrow? Shall we cultivate a ſpirit of goodneſs, beneficence, and charity, and thus make both ourſelves, and all within our circle of influence, as happy as our own powers, the ſtate of the world, and the condition of our nature, will permit? Which is the more eligible ſatisfaction, to gratify a ſhort-lived paſſion, to ſnatch a tranſient gleam of mirth? or to enjoy that continued ſunſhine of delight we feel, when we dry up the tears of the diſtreſſed, and bind up the wounds of the ſorrowful; when we raiſe the dejected head, and comfort the afflicted heart; when we become fathers to the fatherleſs, and cauſe the widow's heart to ſing for joy? Far, far ſuperior is the inward complacency, the heart-felt ſatisfaction, reſulting from ſuch acts of mercy,

mercy, to all the giddy joy, and all the diſſolute pleaſure, that the houſe of mirth, or the gayeſt feſtivity, can inſpire.

The human heart was purpoſely framed with ſuch an happy ſenſibility by its Maker, that, when unvitiated, it has a ſecret pleaſure in ſympathetic ſorrows, and is itſelf relieved by imparting relief to others; and has perhaps a truer delight even in ſharing the afflictions of the unfortunate, and weeping with thoſe that weep, than can be found in the indulgence of any ſenſual or ſelfiſh paſſion.

If ſuch, then, be the advantages which may be derived from attending to ſcenes of Sorrow, Solomon might, in a moral or religious view, juſtly give them a preference to the houſe of mirth. But though this in general be true, yet prudence is requiſite in the application of this, as of other inſtructions; leſt, as is the too common foible of our nature, in order to avoid one, we run inconſiderately into the error of another extreme. It is not to be underſtood, that the prudent and good ſhould confine their converſation to the houſe of mourning, or that all

all are imprudent who entertain themſelves with mirth, or that pleaſure is inconſiſtent, either with the reaſon of a wiſe, or the religion of a good man. Religion may have a ſerious, not an auſtere aſpect; is not of a ſevere and rigid diſpoſition; rejects no pleaſures, but ſuch as are criminal and hurtful, and exceſs in others, that become hurtful merely by exceſs. There is not a ſingle pleaſure worthy of a rational being, that is not, within certain limits, conſiſtent with religion and virtue. The office of wiſdom and religion is only to take care that our pleaſures interfere not with any preſent duty, nor be the occaſion of any future ſorrow or remorſe.

And accordingly the whole deſign of the text is, to give mankind an admonition, which indeed they often want, that the preſent is not a ſtate in which they ſhould purpoſe to attach and devote themſelves ſolely to feſtivity and pleaſure. The ſcenes that every day preſent themſelves, are far from leading to ſuch a diſſipated turn of mind. Conſideration, on the contrary, is the great law of our nature, the firſt principle of wiſdom

dom and right conduct. Often ought we to call our ways to remembrance; to conſider in what manner we have performed our duty to God and our fellow-creatures; how we have conducted ourſelves in proſperity, how felt and relieved the afflictions of thoſe in adverſity, what has been our behaviour in theſe reſpects, and what Account we ſhall one day give of it.

The admiſſion of ſuch reflections, far from laying a burden upon the ſpirits, would be the beſt method to relieve them; far from leading us into the paths of ſorrow, would be the ſureſt guide to tranquillity, and peace of mind. For a rational, permanent tranquillity of mind, is the reſult of virtuous conſideration, the prerogative of innocence, the attendant and reward of religion; for religion is ſo far from taking it away, that nothing elſe can give it. The common amuſements and diſſipations of the world ſerve rather to relax our cares, to ſuſpend a ſenſe of uneaſineſs, and to have the effect of opiates, in creating a ſhort forgetfulneſs of pain, than to ſupply any permanent or ſubſtantial enjoyment. The world

world has not a more valuable and laſting pleaſure, than that ſerene joy of heart which ariſes from the conſciouſneſs of having acquitted ourſelves as we ought, and from the conſequent well-grounded hopes of the favour and approbation of our all-gracious Maker and Judge.

Would you then poſſeſs pure and genuine pleaſure? ſeek it in the paths of virtue. Would you enjoy true felicity? Do you inquire, with the Pſalmiſt, *Who will ſhew us any good?* from him learn where it is to be found: *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.* It is God alone, the Fountain of happineſs, that can convey it to his Creatures; but will moſt certainly convey it to none but the virtuous, the benevolent, the merciful, and the good.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Poſitive inſtitutions inferior to moral duties.

MATTH. xxiii. 23.

Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith: theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

OUR Saviour, in theſe words, reproves the oſtentatious hypocriſy of the Scribes and Phariſees, who were zealouſly punctual in the obſervance of all external and ritual duties, and ſcrupulouſly exact in paying tithes of herbs of ſmall conſideration, whilſt they neglected moral duties, which were of much greater importance, and omit-

ted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith. The former ought not to be left undone; but the latter, as our Lord aſſerts, demand our principal attention, and ought to be the firſt objects of our care.

The text is, then, a general determination, which leaves no room to doubt what is the moſt ſubſtantial and important part of religion, by expreſsly reſolving it into moral rectitude, and integrity of life and manners.

I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate this deciſion of our Lord, by ſhewing, that moral duties are the weightier matters of the law, and in their nature more important, in their obligation more neceſſary, than ritual injunctions; and ſhall conclude with ſome obſervations from the doctrine in the text. And,

I. THE moral duties are thoſe which Reaſon teaches us to be due to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves; which are of eternal and neceſſary obligation, and have in their nature an intrinſic and immutable rectitude:

rectitude: ſuch are piety, juſtice, mercy, fidelity, benevolence, temperance, and the like. Poſitive inſtitutions are ſuch as have in them no intrinſic or immutable excellence, but are only occaſionally appointed, and receive their whole authority from the command of the Legiſlator. Such were circumciſion, ſacrifices, and other ritual obſervances, among the Jews; and ſuch are baptiſm and the euchariſt under the Chriſtian diſpenſation. Theſe duties, indeed, claim our ſtricteſt attention and obſervance, as they are enjoined by the ſupreme Lawgiver, for wiſe purpoſes; but yet are not to be reputed of equal importance or obligation with the moral duties.

God has inſtituted ſome external rites and ceremonies to be obſerved, in order to aid and confirm our natural approbation and eſteem of virtue, to remind us of its obligations, and to incline and habituate us to the practice of it. He has alſo propoſed ſome doctrines to our Faith, with the ſame religious view and tendency. But it cannot be the chief and principal aim of religion to make us proſelytes to ſpeculative opinions,

or

or exterior obſervances. We diſhonour the wiſdom of God, if we ſuppoſe that he can command us to purſue any thing more than thoſe duties in which he has taught us to diſcern the higheſt worth and excellence; or that he can require us to oppoſe the inward ſenſe and perception of our minds, and contradict that moral faculty which himſelf gave us to guide our feet, and to be a light unto our paths.

The pre-eminence of moral duties above ritual injunctions will appear, if we conſider the abſolute goodneſs of the Divine Being; and that the felicity of his creatures is the principal object of the whole adminiſtration of his providence, and of every law to which he requires our obedience. It is evident, then, that a religion of divine inſtitution muſt be chiefly framed with a view to engage our obſervance of thoſe duties which are moſt eſſential to human happineſs; ſuch as, piety, and the ſocial virtues of benevolence, juſtice, fidelity. For to theſe virtues life is indebted for its principal ſatisfactions and enjoyments. They are the true

ſources

ſources of both private and public tranquillity. If, then, theſe are the occaſions and inſtruments of human happineſs, it may reaſonably be inferred, that God, who deſires our happineſs, would have a principal regard to them in the laws which he requires us to obſerve; and would give them the preference above other duties, which have not ſo direct and immediate a tendency to the End of his creation and government,—the felicity of his creatures.

II. RITUAL or ceremonial injunctions muſt be conſidered as ſubordinate to moral duties; becauſe the latter are the end for which the former were inſtituted; and the end muſt be acknowledged to be more valuable and excellent than the means. The ſupreme excellence and perfection, as well as the final happineſs of our nature, is founded on moral virtue: this, conſequently, ought to be our principal view; and every thing elſe muſt derive its value from its ſubſerviency to this end. Ritual inſtitutions are well adapted to this our infant and imperfect ſtate; and as they remind us

of

of the obligations of religion, ſupport us in that uniform exerciſe of virtue, and increaſe our love to God and our neighbour, are religiouſly to be obſerved. They are uſeful as means to produce and preſerve in us a good and pious frame of mind; but where they are ineffectual to theſe purpoſes, (as we too often ſuffer them to be), they loſe their value; they are then *precepts by which men ſhall not live*, as the Prophet has expreſſed it.

III. The ſuperiority and pre-eminence of moral virtue may further appear from hence, that the obligation, and exerciſe of it, will continue for ever; whereas all ceremonial obſervances are in their nature only temporary. *Charity*, ſays St Paul, *never faileth;* which is one reaſon of the preference he gives it above faith and hope. The pious diſpoſitions of the ſoul will not decay nor die with us; but will be continued, improved, perfected, and perpetuated, in heaven. The ſame goodneſs and benevolence of mind which conſtitutes our principal excellence and happineſs here on earth, will continue

continue to be our higheſt perfection and felicity in every future period of our being. From hence, then, may appear the dignity and pre-eminence of moral virtue, when compared with ritual obſervances, which are meant to be aſſiſtances and ſupports to religion, only during the infancy and imperfection of our being; and muſt ceaſe when we arrive at a ſtate of greater improvement and maturity in another life; whereas the moral virtues will conduct and accompany us to heaven; will be the brighteſt gems in our celeſtial crown, and the higheſt ornaments of our moſt elevated ſtate.

IV. The ſcriptures every where repreſent the moral virtues as of the firſt importance, and the chief end of all religion. God did indeed preſcribe to the Jews a pompous ſervice, and a numerous train of rituals, adapted to the genius and circumſtances of that people, and meant to preſerve them from the barbarous idolatries of their neighbour nations, by indulging them in innocent ceremonies of their own. But even under that diſpenſation, theſe were of inferior

inferior importance, when compared to juſtice, truth, integrity, and mercy: and when they were not accompanied with thoſe moral duties, we find that God rejected even his own inſtitutions; oblations were vain, and the multitude of their ſacrifices to no purpoſe.

The great intention of the Goſpel is ſo evidently to engage men in the practice of virtue, and to produce in them all the fruits of righteouſneſs, mercy, and peace, that it is almoſt unneceſſary to produce particular paſſages to this purpoſe. Our Saviour and his Apoſtles every where inculcate piety and virtue, the love of God and man, and repreſent them as the ſubſtance of all religion; they teach us to conſider external obſervances only as means to aſſiſt us in attaining theſe divine virtues, which conſtitute the happineſs and perfection of human nature.

I PROCEED to ſome obſervations deducible from this doctrine. And,

1*ſt*, We may from hence ſee the propriety and neceſſity of frequent exortations to the practice of moral duties. Moral duties

ſeem

ſeem to be held in ſmall eſtimation by ſome perſons, who conſider them as of the loweſt importance in religion, and as fitter ſubjects of inſtruction from a heathen philoſopher, than from a diſciple of the goſpel of Chriſt. But ſuch opinions have no foundation in reaſon or ſcripture; for we have ſeen, that they both agree in repreſenting the moral duties, as what God chiefly values and requires, and what therefore ought principally to be taught and inculcated. Theſe our Saviour himſelf, and his apoſtles, conſtantly urged and recommended as the great aim and end of religion. Our Saviour came into the world to teach men, *to live righteouſly, ſoberly, and godly, in this preſent world.* The apoſtles, in all their diſcourſes, purſued the moral plan of their great Maſter; and every ſervant of Chriſt ought undoubtedly to tread in the ſame ſteps, and inculcate the ſame duties.

2*dly*, We may obſerve how perfectly the Chriſtian Revelation correſponds with the voice of Nature, in aſſerting the importance and excellence of moral virtues, and placing them in the firſt rank of its duties. And

this circumſtance, though not of itſelf, without other evidence, ſufficient to evince the truth and divine original of the goſpel; yet at leaſt intitles it to attention and favour; and muſt incline all the friends of virtue to wiſh well to an inſtitution calculated to eſtabliſh a general integrity of manners, and to promote the moral rectitude, perfection, and univerſal happineſs, of human nature. The intrinſic excellence of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, therefore, gives it a juſt claim to peculiar regard: for the more any inſtitution of religion improves and advances moral rectitude, the more it exalts and dignifies human nature, and is conſequently the more worthy of God; for which reaſon, the advocates for Chriſtianity have wiſely inſiſted on the amiableneſs, purity, and excellence, of its morals, as ſtrong preſumptive marks of its heavenly original.

If, indeed, we ſhould conceive of the religion of Chriſt as inſiſting chiefly on an aſſent to points of Speculation, or the obſervance of external rites,—it will not in this light appear ſo divine and excellent, ſo worthy of God, or ſo well adapted to the wants and neceſſities

neceſſities of his creatures, as in thoſe accounts which our Saviour and his apoſtles have given of it.

3*dly*, and *laſtly*, From hence we may learn to be eſpecially careful in obſerving the duties of integrity, piety, juſtice, mercy, and the like. Let us not conclude, that we are religious, becauſe we are right in our Faith, or punctual in our attendance on public worſhip. Theſe are indeed excellent and neceſſary means and helps to religion; but religion itſelf is ſeated in the mind, and conſiſts in that reverence and obedience of heart to God, and thoſe upright and friendly diſpoſitions towards men, which thoſe means are intended to produce and promote in us. But as when, upon a compariſon of two objects, one is found to be leſs important than the other, we are often weak enough to conſider it as ſcarce of any importance at all, it is highly neceſſary to remind ourſelves, that we ought not to preſume to neglect or diſregard any inſtitutions of divine appointment; that our obligations to obey all God's commands whatever, are abſolute and indiſpenſable; and that commands merely poſitive, admitted to be from him, lay

lay us under the ſtricteſt obligation to obſerve them, and are not to be ſlighted or undervalued, under a pretence, that they are in their nature and importance inferior to morality.

LET us be careful, then, to pay a due regard to poſitive precepts, as they are enjoined by the authority of Him to whom we owe all obedience; and as they are wiſely framed for the improvement and eſtabliſhment of virtue; but let us remember, that moral rectitude and goodneſs are the weightier matters of the law; that *theſe are to be done, and the other not to be left undone.*

SER-

SERMON VII.

Goodneſs of God in the Redemption.

1 JOHN iv. 10.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins.

THat God, the Creator of all things, is a Being merciful and gracious, benignant and compaſſionate,—is a truth which Nature dictates, and was generally underſtood and acknowledged even in the Gentile world. Nor need we wonder, that they who were left to the ſole inveſtigations of reaſon, unaſſiſted by revealed inſtructions, ſhould yet form ſo juſt a conception of the divine nature. The goodneſs of the Deity is viſible in that prevalence of Good which is apparent

parent in his works; in the common adminiſtration of Providence; in the face of nature; in our own frame; and in the frame of all things around us.

The ſacred writings ſpeak the ſame language with the voice of nature in this particular,—and aſſure us, that God is good to all; that his tender mercies are over all his works; that his goodneſs extends, not only to thoſe whoſe obedience and virtue might make them hope to be conſidered as proper objects of it, but even to the diſobedient and undeſerving, whom he invites to obedience by repeated mercies, to whom he never refuſes forgiveneſs when they return to duty.

But the divine goodneſs has not only been amply diſplayed in the works of creation, and in the conduct of providence, but alſo in the redemption of mankind; which ſhall be the ſubject of our preſent thoughts.

God, the original author and giver of every good gift, hath with a liberal hand conferred his bleſſings upon every creature he hath made, according to its capacity, and

and to the ſtation and rank allotted it, and as far as was conducive to the end which his ſupreme wiſdom intended. But when we have ſurveyed and conſidered all the various meaſures of goodneſs diſtributed to other creatures, we ſhall find a ſtill ampler portion of it conſpicuous in the nature of Man, whom his Creator has placed in a higher rank, and inveſted with more eminent privileges and prerogatives, than the reſt of the viſible creation. For even in the formation of our corporeal frame, of *this tabernacle of clay*, *this earthly houſe*, (as the apoſtle calls it), he ſeems to have expreſſed a peculiar attention to the human ſpecies, who excell all other creatures even in exterior appearance,—in erectneſs of ſtature, gracefulneſs of form, and in the conſtruction and diſpoſition of every part, for ornament, convenience, and mutual aſſiſtance.

But theſe, it muſt be acknowledged, are the leaſt of the favours conferred by the divine bounty. Man's principle glory conſiſts in being formed after the likeneſs and image of his Maker, i. e. in being inveſted with moral and intellectual powers; for theſe

theſe are properly the Reſemblances of the Deity, whereby man may in ſome ſenſe be ſaid to participate of the divine nature. Impoſſible it is, that this image or likeneſs of God ſhould conſiſt in our outward form or conſtruction; but it conſiſts rather in the rational faculties of the ſoul; or, moſt of all, in the moral Rectitude of thoſe faculties.

This image, then, of God, according to which man is ſaid to be formed, muſt be conſidered as an expreſſion denoting, that man, in his original formation, was of an order ſuperior to all other animal beings till then created, and was endowed with a power of conforming his nature to that of the Almighty, in the frame of his ſpirit, and in the rectitude of his actions; not that man could ever preſume to be holy as God is holy, or perfect as he is perfect; but that infinitely holy and good being could not ſet his ſeal on any intellectual part of creation, but the impreſſion would be in ſome degree like himſelf, good and holy alſo.

Such was man; ſuch the rectitude of his mind and will; ſuch his ſimilitude to his Maker in his primeval ſtate, as he original-

ly came forth, pure and immaculate, from the hands of his Creator. Reaſon then ſate at the helm, undiſturbed, and ſteered according to the calm dictates of the Underſtanding,—ſubject to no tempeſtuous commotions from appetites or paſſions. He had no enemy within to contend with,—the ſenſitive powers being obedient to the intellectual; no law in his members oppoſing the law of his mind; no licentious paſſions warring againſt the authority and government of Reaſon. A beam of light, a ray of divine wiſdom, ſhone upon his underſtanding, which diſcovered to him the rule of life. There was a harmony between his reaſon and affections; an original righteouſneſs; ſo that it ſeemed much more eaſy for him to perſevere in a faithful obſervance of the precept given by his Maker for the trial of his obedience, than to depart from it, and liſten to the perſuaſions of the tempter.

But man, by unhappily perverting his powers, and tranſgreſſing the laws of his Creator, incurred the divine diſpleaſure, and became ſubject to death,—the conſequence denounced to tranſgreſſion. And

as all men ſinned, the wages of ſin became due to all. For it being at all times our moſt reaſonable duty to pay an univerſal obedience to the laws of God, every violation of thoſe laws juſtly expoſed the offender to the puniſhment due to his tranſgreſſion.

But though man became a wilful ſinner by the perverſion of his liberty, and by a voluntary ſelf-depravation; yet as the frailty of his nature laid him open to deception and tranſgreſſion, the Father of our being looked with an eye of compaſſion, and conſidered him as a fit object of mercy; for *he knew whereof we were made, and remembered that we were but duſt.* He was pleaſed, therefore, to extend his compaſſion to our fallen nature; and the effect of this compaſſion was, the miſſion of his Son into the world, to be a propitiation for our ſins, and, by the oblation of himſelf, to make a full and ſufficient ſacrifice and ſatisfaction for the ſins of the world. For our ſakes the Son of God deſcended from the heavens, and dwelt upon earth; took our nature into a cloſe and intimate union with his own; publiſhed the gracious terms of his covenant, and

and ſealed it with his blood; by the effuſion and oblation of which, he made an atonement for our ſins, paid the penalty due for our iniquities, and bore the burden of an offending world.

God ſo loved the world, that he gave up his Son, and the Son ſo loved the world, that he gave up himſelf, for our ſalvation. If we contemplate the Son of God, reſigning the inconceivable glory which he poſſeſſed with the Father before the foundation of the world, paſſing through a gradation of humiliation and ſufferings, condeſcending to unite himſelf to our nature, in its loweſt form, and moſt afflicted ſtate; if we attend him through the various ſcenes of his paſſion, ſhedding in his agony drops of blood, dragged to crucifixion by a barbarous multitude, expoſed as an object of public deriſion, the ſcorn of the malicious, and ſport of the inſolent; his ſacred head inſulted with the impious mockery of a crown of thorns; himſelf affixed to the painful croſs, reviled and blaſphemed, bleeding and expiring, ſuffering every indignity, and every torture,

torture, in order to reconcile to God thoſe his creatures, who had forfeited every claim to favour;—we cannot but acknowledge it to be an amazing proof of the moſt affectionate goodneſs; we muſt be loſt in wonder at the riches of his mercy; we muſt feel a powerful conviction, that never was love like this love, nor compaſſion like that of our Redeemer.

O all-gracious Saviour of mankind! what words can expreſs the gratitude we owe! How inadequate to thy mercies are our adorations! The tongues of men and angels can but imperfectly praiſe thee. Thou haſt redeemed us by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: For this cauſe, at thy name, which is above every name, every knee ſhall bow; for worthy art thou to receive bleſſing, and glory, and honour, and power, for ever and ever.

WHAT has been obſerved may ſuggeſt the following reflections.

1*ſt*, We may from hence learn, how dreadful an evil, and how offenſive to God, ſin is, which nothing but the blood of his Son

Son could expiate; and how neceſſary and indiſpenſable is religious obedience to render us fit objects of divine mercy. In order to be the propitiation for our ſins, the Son of God, who was ſo high in the glory of his Father, ſubmitted to the loweſt circumſtances of humanity, ſuffered an ignominious and painful death; not the death of a common tranſgreſſor, but one reſerved by the Romans for the worſt and moſt flagitious of criminals.

The death of Chriſt is in ſcripture repreſented to be in the ſtricteſt ſenſe a propitiatory ſacrifice. The eſſence of a propitiatory ſacrifice conſiſts in this, that the guilt of the ſinner is transferred to the victim, and the one is ſubſtituted and ſuffers in the place of the other. If, then, God, when about to diſplay the extent of his goodneſs, and the riches of his mercy, in the remiſſion of our ſins, would yet accept no leſs ranſom, no meaner expiation, than the ſufferings and ſacrifice of his Son, what proſpect or hope can we have of eſcaping the reſentments of his juſtice, if we ſtill perſiſt in diſobedience? For let us remember, that the

benefits

benefits of our Redeemer's ſufferings extend only to the penitent and reformed, not to the preſumptuous and perſevering offender. And if we are not careful to avail ourſelves of theſe ſufferings; if we preſume to deſpiſe the mercies of this covenant; if we neglect this greateſt, laſt ſalvation, this laſt effort of divine goodneſs to ſave us;—there remains no further expiation, no more ſacrifice for ſin, no other Redeemer to ſuffer, no new covenant to be made. The ſon of God will be no Saviour to us; the blood of Chriſt, that fountain of mercy, will for us flow in vain, and be inſufficient to waſh away the ſtains and pollution of our guilt.

2*dly*, If God ſo loved us, as to appoint and accept the death of his Son as an expiatory ſacrifice, by which all paſt and forſaken ſins are forgiven, and we are readmitted to the divine favour; we ought alſo, in imitation of the divine goodneſs, to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us. We are by nature equal, fellow-ſervants of the ſame Lord, heirs of the ſame hopes; and the wideſt diſtinctions of birth, wealth power, or ſtation,

ſtation, place us at no great diſtance one from another. The indignities or injuries, therefore, we may receive from our fellow-creatures, can, in the meaſure of their guilt, bear no proportion to the offences we commit againſt the infinite Sovereign of the Univerſe, by whoſe power we ſubſiſt, and on whoſe mercy we depend; to whom we owe our being, and all the bleſſings that attend it; who daily helpeth us, and poureth his benefits upon us; and has engaged us to him by various wonders of love, and repeated miracles of mercy.

If, then, God forgives our ſins, thus heightened and aggravated by ſo many conſiderations of goodneſs; and forgives them in a manner ſo expreſſive of his affection, as to appoint his Son to be the victim in our ſtead; what violence or injuries can we receive one from another, that ought not to claim forgiveneſs from us? Since our heavenly Father is thus merciful to us, how ought we to be merciful one to another?

But how widely different from this precept of our Lord, is the too general practice of

of thoſe who aſſume the name of his followers? Inſtead of kind affections, and friendly offices, how willing are we too often to ſeize the opportunities that offer of repaying injuries with injuries, and of rendering evil for evil? How prone to approve, how prompt to execute, every dictate of revenge? But with a behaviour ſo repugnant to the precepts and example of our benevolent Redeemer, how can we hope to participate in the mercies and bleſſings he has purchaſed for us? how can we lift up our eyes to implore his mediation? What ſelf-condemnation muſt we feel from a compariſon of our own conduct with that of our bleſſed Lord? How ought we to fear, leſt he for ever turn away his eyes from thoſe whoſe diſpoſitions and manners are ſo much the reverſe of his own?

Laſtly, Let us reflect, that this ineſtimable bleſſing, this mighty ſalvation wrought for us, calls for our ſincereſt acknowledgements, and the moſt devout ſacrifices of praiſe and thankſgiving to God, the author, and to Jeſus, the voluntary miniſter, of

of this diſpenſation of mercy. Let us expreſs our acknowledgements in a grateful and inviolable obedience to every injunction of this great Preſerver of ſouls. What better return can we make to the Almighty, than, with hearts deeply affected by a juſt ſenſe of the greatneſs of his mercy, to pay our higheſt tribute of adoration to him, who was ſo gracious, as not only at our creation to impreſs on the human mind the image of his own goodneſs,—and thus to render us in ſome ſenſe partakers of the divine nature, and of all the happineſs conſequent upon it; but alſo, when we had defaced this image, had plunged ourſelves in ſin and miſery, and ſaw extinguiſhed all hopes of ever arriving at that ſtate of perfection and felicity for which we were originally deſigned,—was pleaſed to reſtore us to a new capacity of happineſs, by ſending his Son into the world, to take our nature and our guilt upon him, and to make an atonement for the ſins of mankind?

This paternal goodneſs of God demands from his creatures every expreſſion of filial love; and this love is to be expreſſed, as the

apoſtle informs us, in keeping his command-ments. We are to love his law, we are to delight in conforming to his will, we are to obey his precepts, not from conſtraint, not barely from a conviction of our obligations, and a ſenſe of duty to him, but our ſenſe of duty muſt be animated by an affection to his ſervice, by a love of obedience, and the moſt grateful ſentiments of his goodneſs to us, particularly in our redemption.

May we, then, never render in vain the incarnation and ſufferings of our Redeemer; may we never by our ſins diſappoint the gracious intentions of his mercy; may we form our lives and manners by his example and precepts, and ever conduct ourſelves as becomes a people redeemed by his love. May we make a proper uſe and improvement of the expreſſions of divine goodneſs to us in this world; and then we may be aſſured, that we ſhall be finally favoured with much higher communications of it, when heaven and immortality ſhall be our portion.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

On reſignation to the will of God.

1 SAM. iii. 18.

It is the Lord; let him do what ſeemeth him good.

IN the preſent precarious ſtate of human life, chequered and intermixed as it is with good and evil, frequent occaſions may, ſome moſt certainly will, call upon us to exerciſe the duty exemplified in the text,—the duty of an humble acquieſence and ſubmiſſive reſignation to the divine diſpenſations.

This world, far from being ſo completely happy as infinite power, and perfect, abſolute goodneſs, might have made it, was meant by its Creator to be a ſtate, not of ſerene, undiſturbed tranquillity and happi-

neſs,

neſs, but of moral diſcipline and trial. We are born to troubles, to various diſaſters, which await all men, in all conditions; from which neither grandeur, nor power, nor wealth, nor wiſdom, nor even innocence, can give a protection. They are common to all, the greateſt, the wiſeſt, and the beſt. For if we look abroad into the world, where ſhall we find thoſe happy ſons of proſperity, whoſe term of years has been all white, blotted with no misfortunes, no injuries, no pains of body, or diſtreſſes of mind, no afflictions in their own perſon, or in the perſons of others, allied to them, by intereſt, friendſhip, or affection, whoſe ſufferings they eſteem their own? The law of our being, the condition of our nature, permits us not to be completely happy on this ſide heaven. In our preſent ſtate, we may always expect viciſſitudes of fortune, and that ſome of the numerous evils diſperſed up and down the world will meet us in our progreſs through it.

As reſignation, then, to the divine appointments, is a duty which muſt ſometimes, may often, be required of us, it concerns us

to

to be aquainted with the nature of it, and to know with what ſentiments, and what frame of mind, we ſhould meet and receive the adverſe accidents that may happen to viſit us.

Let us then inquire, 1*ſt*, What is implied in a proper reſignation to the will of Heaven; and, 2*dly*, Let us conſider the Rectitude and Propriety of ſuch a conduct.

I. THIS duty, we may obſerve, does not prohibit all ſenſibility of ſufferings; it is not meant to extinguiſh our ſenſations, or reconcile us to our averſions, or to reverſe the nature of things, or change our opinions about them. We are not required to diveſt ourſelves of our feelings, and new-model the heart. A Stoical inſenſibility of afflictive events is what the mind, in its right ſtate, is incapable of; nor can any religious conſiderations call off the attention we neceſſarily give to what is painful and afflicting. And indeed Religion, which bids us feel for the unhappy, and weep with them that weep; which approves each ſofter movement of the ſoul, and applauds us for being touched

touched with the diſtreſſes of others, cannot be ſuppoſed to condemn the concern we muſt feel for our own. Even the Saviour of the world had ſo exquiſite a ſenſe of ſufferings, that, as himſelf ſaid, his ſoul was exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death; and the apprehenſions of them extorted from him repeated petition, to his Father, that, if it were poſſible, the cup might paſs from him.

We need not, then, think ourſelves culpable, or wanting in our ſubmiſſion to Heaven, if a too tender ſenſibility ſhould happen to betray us into ſome weakneſſes or diſorders, provided we ſuppreſs all angry remonſtrances, all unbecoming reſentments againſt our Maker, and think reſpectfully of his Providence, and expreſs the ſame reverential ſubmiſſion with our Lord, *Father, not my will, but thine be done.*

But though we cannot reconcile ourſelves to ſufferings, nor can the moſt devout reverence of God always teach us a contempt of them; yet duty requires us to make an oblation of our wills to him, to make all our deſires and averſions yeld and bend to his appoint-

appointments; to ſubmit to the ſufferings we would decline, as to the corrections of a parent,—whoſe intentions are kind, when his diſcipline ſeems ſevere; to drink the bitter cup we would wiſh to avoid, without reproaching the hand that adminiſters the diſtaſteful, but ſalutary preſcription; and to ſay, in the ſubmiſſive language of the text, *It is the Lord; let him do what ſeemeth him good.*—Which leads me,

II. To conſider the Reaſonableneſs and Propriety of this duty of ſubmiſſion or reſignation to the divine will. And no duty, no diſpoſition of mind, can appear more reaſonable in itſelf, or more reverential to the Diety, when we reflect, that we are not neglected or overlooked by our Creator, not diſmiſſed from his care, nor left in the hands of Fate or Fortune, but are under the immediate protection and guardianſhip of the infinitely powerful Parent of Nature, in whoſe preſence, and under whoſe inſpection, we always live and move, and who watches over us, and over all his creatures, even the leaſt, the loweſt, the moſt unworthy,

thy, with a care that never ſlumbers. The ſame infinite, almighty Being, who framed the world, is, though to us inviſible, intimately preſent to every part of it, and inſpects and ſuperintends the whole. Unable as we are to penetrate into the counſels of his providence; though clouds and darkneſs are round about him; though his judgements are like the great deep, unfathomable, and his ways paſt finding out; yet ſtill we may be aſſured, that Nature, in all her operations, obeys his voice; and that not one event can take place without his appointment, or permiſſion.

This ſuperintendence of the Supreme Being is a juſt ground for Reſignation to his appointments; eſpecially when we conſider, that his wiſdom, as well as his power, is infinite, and his goodneſs commenſurate to both; that his all-comprehending mind ſees the nature and tendencies of all things, beholds their moſt diſtant effects and conſequences, and has the whole infinite chain and ſucceſſion of events at once in his view; and that he is as merciful and good, as he is wiſe and powerful; is the friend of his creatures;

creatures; and governs them, not by arbitrary mandates, or the mere dictates of will, but by the law of kindneſs, the laws of wiſdom, mercy, and goodneſs.

If, then, the world be under the government of a Being infinitely wiſe and good, as the Scripture aſſures us it is, and Reaſon tells us it muſt be; if his care extends even to the loweſt objects, and the moſt inconſiderable events;—all our paſſions and deſires, our hopes and fears, our every inclination, ſhould pay homage to his ſovereign will, and ſubmit and yield to his appointments. For though we were not able to diſcern any kind intention of the Deity in the evils with which he may occaſionally viſit us; though we could aſſign no reaſon for their infliction, nor apprehend any ſalutary effect reſulting from them; though the ways of Heaven were ſtill more intricate, and the mazes of Providence leſs eaſy to be traced, than we now apprehend them to be;—ſtill we might with aſſurance confide in almighty power, conducted by infinite goodneſs, under the direction of unerring wiſdom.

Eſpecially when we conſider, that it is impoſſible for our imperfect ſight to diſcern what, upon the whole, is beſt. Our limited underſtandings can know only in part; we have but a dim proſpect into futurity; and, far from penetrating into the remote iſſues of any one event, can at the moſt take in but a few links of the infinitely-extended chain. This reflection ſhould teach us to moderate our deſires, and reduce them to an acquieſcence in the determinations of that unerring wiſdom, which alone can determine what is good or evil for us. The events which in their preſent appearance ſeem moſt afflictive; and which we are, therefore, moſt inclined to except out of our ſubmiſſion, may be, and moſt certainly are, deſigned, in the plan of the divine government, to be the means and inſtruments of producing ſome good,—the channel for conveying ſome bleſſing, here or hereafter, which could not otherwiſe be obtained. For from the fountain of inexhauſtable goodneſs, no real evils, we may be aſſured, can flow. Abſolute evils, evils that have no relation or tendency to good, can find

find no place in the works of an all-perfect Being.

When we conſider, therefore, the infinite diſparity between the Sovereign of the world and ourſelves; when we reflect on our own ignorance and incapacity, and how unfit theſe are to comprehend the wiſdom of the Creator, or to penetrate into the counſels of Providence, or to form a judgement of what is moſt ſalutary to ourſelves, and moſt conducive to our beſt intereſts;—what can be more reaſonable, than to ſubmit to the appointments of a Being, whoſe preſence always ſurrounds, whoſe wiſdom can always guard us, whoſe arm is never ſhortened that it cannot ſave, nor his goodneſs exhauſted that it will not relieve; who always has it in his power, and in his inclination, to do better for us than we can aſk or think? What more juſt, than to reſign ourſelves to his guidance, not with a reluctant, extorted compliance, but with a willing acquieſcence and complacency? For his wiſdom beſt knows our true intereſt, cannot fail to conſult, and will moſt certainly accompliſh it,

if

if we ourſelves do not unhappily obſtruct the deſigns of his goodneſs.

Too, too often indeed, rejecting the admonitions of Religion, and giving ear to the counſels of wayward Paſſion, we oppoſe and counteract the kind intentions of the Deity; and, inſtead of converting adverſities into bleſſings, by a reſigned and religious deportment under them, we create them where they are not, and aggravate them where they are. Forgetful of the various ſucceſſive mercies we have received, the leaſt of which may be greater than the beſt of us deſerve, we are apt to pour out undutiful murmurs and complaints; and ſo unreaſonable ſometimes are we, as to complain of ſufferings, though they are not ſent by Heaven, but are of our own creating; are not the inflictions of Providence, but the effects of our own iniquity, imprudence, or indiſcretion; and ſometimes, even though they are not real, but exiſt only in imagination, and have no being but what we ourſelves give them.

But can it ever become the thing formed to expoſtulate with him that formed it? Shall creatures of an hour cenſure the conduct

duct of eternal Wiſdom? Shall we, the loweſt, as far as we know, of intellectual beings, we who ſubſiſt upon the daily alms of our Creator, and owe our being, and well-being, all we have and are, to his favour,—ſhall we preſume to repine, or remonſtrate againſt the equity of his adminiſtration? If the Ruler of the Univerſe, who has ever one great deſign in view, which he is conſtantly and uniformly carrying on,—that of the greateſt, moſt abſolute, and general happineſs, of his creatures; if he ſees certain portions of temporary affliction to be conducive to that deſign, or neceſſary to the completion of his plan of providence;—ſhall we, who cannot enter into his counſels, preſume to impeach the wiſdom of them? Shall we preſume to call him to an account? Shall we dare to reproach his goodneſs, or be impatient under his diſpenſations?

But unbecoming as this impatience is, what advantage can it bring with it? what other can be its effect, than to add one evil to another, and to irritate and inflame the wounds which it cannot heal? Whereas

Reſignation

Reſignation is not only a reaſonable ſervice, —the undoubted duty of a creature to its creator,—but is at the ſame time a wiſe and merciful preſcription, deſigned to mitigate our pains, to heal our ſorrows, and adminiſter ſuch relief as our caſe will admit. For the misfortunes that meet us derive their chief malignity from the inward diſpoſition with which we receive them: it is not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, ſo much events themſelves, as our ſentiments and opinions about them, that render us unhappy; it is our own impatience that is the ſting of affliction. To correct theſe opinions, and this impatience, by the conſiderations that religion offers; to ſummon all our reaſon, and aſſemble all the powers of the mind, to aſſiſt in ſupporting what we muſt bear,—is the ſuggeſtion of wiſdom and prudence, as well as the dictate of religion and duty.

Let us then learn an humble acquieſcence in the diſpenſations of Heaven; let us learn to acknowledge God in all our ways; to view every occurrence in the light in which Religion places it; and to attribute the evils

we ſuffer, as well as the good things we enjoy, not only to immediate and apparent cauſes, but to the divine will and appointment. Let us remember, that God, the governor of the world, rules all things with his ſovereign power; that no event can take place, but by his permiſſion; that no accident is ſo ſmall or inconſiderable, as to eſcape his notice and direction; that none can find us unguarded by his providence; that he is too wiſe to miſtake the happineſs of his creatures,—too good not to conſult it.

Whatever, then, may be our ſtate or condition, whether proſperous or adverſe, let us conſider it as the appointment of Heaven. Whether we receive good or evil, let us receive it as from the hand of God; let us receive his bleſſings with thankfulneſs, his inflictions without murmuring; let us be reſigned to his will, and devoted to his ſervice; let us be all ſubmiſſion to his diſpenſations, and all obedience to his laws:—ſo may we have good grounds to expect, when we depart from this vale of tears, this uncertain ſtate of probation and diſcipline, this chequered ſcene of good and evil, that we may

bid

bid adieu to ſuffering, and take a final leave of whatever can grieve or moleſt us; and may hope to aſcend to thoſe regions of immortal bliſs, where no troubles invade, no evil can ever approach, where the voice of Sorrow is never heard, where true happineſs will be found, where will be fulneſs of joy, and pleaſures for evermore.

SER.

SERMON IX.

On the general judgement.

MATTH. XXIV. 44.

Therefore be ye alſo ready; for in ſuch an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh.

THE Reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord, and his triumph over death and the grave, are to be conſidered as the divine ratification of the authority by which he acted, and of the truth of all his declarations. We cannot now doubt, but that, as himſelf declared, he will come again in the glory of his Father, to reward every man according as his work ſhall be. We cannot doubt but *that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that*

Man whom he has ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he raiſed him from the dead.

In this diſcourſe, I ſhall obſerve, 1*ſt*, That our Saviour Chriſt, the Son of man, is the perſon conſtituted Judge of the world; 2*dly*, That his coming will be ſudden and unexpected, in ſuch an hour as we think not; and, *laſtly*, Shall conſider how much it concerns us to be always in a ſtate of Readineſs and Preparation for that awful event.

I. Our Saviour Chriſt, the Son of man, is the perſon who will judge the world. *The Father*, ſays one Evangeliſt, *judgeth no man, but has committed all judgement unto the Son. The Son of man*, ſays another, *ſhall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then ſhall he reward every man according to his works.* We are informed elſewhere, that *at the end of the world, the Son of man ſhall ſit on the throne of his glory; and before him ſhall be gathered all nations;* and that *it is he who is ordained of God to be judge of the quick and dead.* There are many

ny other paſſages in ſcripture of the ſame import, which it is unneceſſary to enumerate, all repreſenting our Saviour Chriſt as the miniſter of divine juſtice in the final allotment of rewards and puniſhments.

We may obſerve in the before-mentioned paſſages, and where-ever our Saviour is introduced as the perſon who is to judge the world, that he is generally deſcribed under the appellation of *the Son of man;* the reaſon of which has been ſuppoſed to be, that he will on that occaſion appear in a human form, as when he aſſumed our nature, and dwelt upon earth. He will in like manner, we are told, deſcend from heaven, as he aſcended to it: but his appearance will then be with far ſuperior majeſty, and more like the Son of Him who is Lord of Heaven and Earth.

At his firſt advent, when he deſcended from the heavenly regions, he ſubmitted to all the humiliations and ſufferings of mortality. At his ſecond advent, the veil which had obſcured his divine nature will be done away, and he will appear in the glory of his Father, in a manner becoming the dignity

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of his high office, attended with an infinite hoſt of angels: *Thouſands of thouſands ſhall ſtand before him, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand ſhall miniſter unto him.* He will then deck himſelf with light as with a garment, and will be clothed with ſuch ſuperior luſtre, that St. John, in his viſion, repreſents all Nature vaniſhing and diſappearing amidſt the refulgence of his glory. *I ſaw,* ſays he, *a great white throne, and him that ſat on it, from whoſe face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was no place found for them.*

Our Saviour Chriſt is, then, the perſon conſtituted judge of the world. And it ought to be conſidered as a clear, explicit declaration of our Maker's compaſſionate intentions, that the ſame perſon is to ſit in Judgement, who in mercy condeſcended to aſſume our nature, and dwell among us. For what more equitable or favourable judge could even our wiſhes figure to us, than the very perſon who offered himſelf a voluntary ſacrifice to redeem and ſave loſt mankind? than he who for our ſake quitted the heavenly throne, and became ſubject to our infirmities?

firmities? As our nature was thus highly favoured by him, may we not humbly hope, that mercy will prevail againſt judgement; and that forgiveneſs will be refuſed to none, but ſuch as have rendered themſelves utterly unworthy of it?

II. THE coming of our Lord will be ſudden and unexpected, in ſuch an hour as we think not. *The day of the Lord will come*, ſay the ſcriptures, *as a thief in the night*. In the laſt age of the world, its diſſolution will be an event as much unexpected, as, in the days of Noah, was the deluge which covered the face of the earth. Whilſt mankind are engaged in their different purſuits; whilſt ſome are purchaſing pleaſure at the expence of every virtue, others attempting to extend their power by every method of oppreſſion, and almoſt all as attentive to the concerns of the world, as if thoſe concerns were to ſubſiſt for ever; — they will ſee an unexpected, but laſting period, put to all their purſuits,—and all their hopes and projects loſt in the general devaſtation. Whilſt ſome are perhaps mocking at this awful

awful prediction of our Lord, and ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming? they will be ſurpriſed with the ſudden and amazing proof of its completion.

For the ſcriptures do not inform us, that any preparatory notice will be given of this final revolution. There will be no uncommon appearances in the heavens, or the earth, to preſignify its approach; no viſible decay in the conſtitution of Nature, no prognoſtics of its diſſolution, no apparent ſymptoms of diſorder. The ſun will continue, as uſual, to rule the day, and the moon to govern the night. The ſeaſons will move on in their appointed round, the earth produce its annual ſtores, and the world ſeem likely to ſubſiſt for a long ſucceſſion of ages. Nature, however, notwithſtanding theſe appearances of health and vigour, will on a ſudden ſicken, and expire in violent convulſions.

But of that day and hour, ſays our bleſſed Saviour, knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Over that event God has thrown a thick veil, through which no eye

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but his own can penetrate. But of this we may be aſſured, that he is equally benevolent and merciful in whatever he reveals, and whatever he with-holds from us. As he is kind in imparting to us the knowledge of ſuch things as are neceſſary or uſeful to be known, he is no leſs merciful in concealing others which might be hurtful. He hath informed us of whatever is neceſſary to prompt and animate us to aſſiduity and vigilance in our duty; but hath with-held that knowledge which might tempt and betray us into a ſlothful and careleſs confidence.

If the day and hour of the laſt judgement were known with preciſion and certainty; its terrors, if near, would intimidate too much; if diſtant, might affect us too little. In the former caſe, we ſhould be too neglectful of our affairs in this world; in the latter, too inattentive to the concerns of the next. God, therefore, in all the diſpenſations of his providence equally wiſe and good, and who deſires to have both our hopes and our fears, our knowledge and our ignorance, to be alike inſtrumental to our happineſs,

happineſs, has been pleaſed to hide the important ſecret in his own boſom; to conceal from us the period of the general judgement, in order that we may always be prepared, without being terrified; attentive always to our ſalvation in the next world, without too much indifference to the concerns of the preſent.—— Which leads me,

III. and *laſtly*, To conſider the wiſdom of holding ourſelves always in a ſtate of Preparation for the coming of our Lord. Whenever we reflect, that the preſent life is meant to be introductory to another, infinitely more important, ſtate of being, and that the awful period is approaching, how ſoon we know not, when we muſt all appear before the tribunal of the righteous Sovereign of the earth, whoſe irreverſible ſentence will be deciſive of our fate for ever, —this ſurely ought to create in us a moſt ſerious ſolicitude to avoid every behaviour that may offend our Almighty Judge, and apply to every duty and virtue that can recommend us to his approbation and acceptance.

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It is matter of juſt ſurpriſe, that many who profeſs their conviction of a future judgement, ſhould be as inattentive to that great event, and appear to live as little under its influence, as others who have no ſuch expectations: A conduct highly reproachful to human reaſon. The loweſt degree of probability for an event of ſuch conſequence, ought, doubtleſs, to demand attention, and excite us to a preparation for it. But when we have ſufficient and ſatisfactory evidence,—ſuch evidence as leaves in the mind no diffidence or ſuſpicion of its certainty,—ſurely, if we would act in any degree as becomes rational beings, we ought to make it the object of ſerious and frequent meditation; and be above all things concerned, by a ſtrict attention to every duty, to intitle ourſelves to a favourable ſentence from the heavenly throne. This ſhould ſeem the natural effect of our belief of a future judgement.

And to impreſs us with a more ſerious and awful ſenſe of that ſolemnity, and to animate us to the moſt vigilant preparation for it,—the coming of our Lord, for that pur-

poſe, is deſcribed with all the ſtriking circumſtances of pomp, magnificence, and majeſty, that ſeem likely to affect the mind. He will come, we are informed, in his own glory, and his Father's, with all the holy angels. At his appearance, the face of nature will be changed, and the frame of the world diſſolved. The heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe; the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat; the earth alſo, and the works that are therein, ſhall be burnt up. The repreſentation which the ſcripture draws of this awful ſcene, is meant to animate us to a due preparation for it; and ſeeing all theſe things are to be diſſolved, to excite us to conſider well what manner of perſons we ought to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs.

At what diſtance this great event may be, or how long our Lord may delay his coming, we are not informed. Our Lord himſelf has foretold, that *as a ſnare it will come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*, and will ſurpriſe them in ſuch an hour as they think not. The judgement of the great day may poſſibly, even now be near

near approaching; in which caſe, if we are unprepared, it will be too late for preparation to begin. Such as our condition is, ſuch will be our irreverſible fate for endleſs ages. If we are not in Readineſs, the opportunity for it, and we ourſelves, are for ever loſt.

It may indeed be ſuppoſed, with more probability, that this may be a remote event, and that the general judgement may be at the diſtance of many ages; but yet another awful event muſt ſoon and certainly happen. The period when our ſtate of probation will determine, and our trial be concluded, cannot be far diſtant; and that event is, in effect, with regard to our future condition, the ſame as that of Judgement, and, like it too, unknown, and wrapt in darkneſs. For ſuch is the natural weakneſs of the human frame; ſuch the various diſorders, and unknown accidents, to which we ſtand expoſed; ſo numerous, ſo unſeen, the avenues to eternity; that we ought not, cannot, be ſecure even of to-morrow.

Shall we, then, with an imprudence which we cannot but diſapprove, ſhall we riſk all

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our future hopes; ſhall we poſtpone the care of the ſoul to ſome ſuppoſed hereafter, or even to to-morrow, when we know not what events a day may bring forth?

We are often tempted, indeed, to indulge the pleaſing, viſionary proſpect of a long ſucceſſion of years; eſpecially if we are favoured with the appearances of health and ſtrength. Our attachment to life and ſelf-partiality are apt to perſuade us, that we ſhall live long, and ſee good days; that our term of years may be prolonged to the utmoſt period; that a gradual decay of conſtitution will give us timely notice to prepare for hereafter; and, on that preſumption, we lay aſide, or poſtpone, all attention to futurity.

But the hope of long life is but the inſinuation of ſelf-flattery. We ſhould conſider, that others have been favoured with the ſame ſalutary appearances, have indulged the ſame hopes; that theſe hopes and appearances have deceived them, and may equally deceive us. How many muſt we have known, who, amidſt all the apparent ſymptoms, and the moſt flattering promiſes of

of long life, and amidſt all the confidence of preſumed ſecurity, have been unexpectedly taken captive by the univerſal conqueror, who putteth all things under his feet?

If, then, Heaven has not vouchſafed to certify us how long we have to live; has not informed us of our end, and of the number of our days;—it is ſurely wiſdom to make it our ſerious and habitual, as it is undoubtedly our moſt important concern, to be prepared always to give obedience to the heavenly voice, whenever it ſhall pleaſe the Lord of life and death to ſummon us to his tribunal.

It is not here to be underſtood, that a future judgement ſhould be the perpetual object of our meditations, or that we ſhould be always directly and formally preparing for it; for that is incompatible with the ſtate and condition of human life, and with the duties we owe to the world, and to ourſelves. But in order to be habitually prepared, let us begin an immediate reformation of what we find amiſs in our manners, and live in a regular, perſevering obedience to the

the divine laws. The beſt, the only ſecure preparative for hereafter, are the virtues of a good life. Without theſe, the laſt hour may, when we look not for it, hurry us away to judgement, before our accounts are ready, and convey us out of this world, before we have made proviſion for the next.

Every inſtance that occurs of ſudden mortality, ſeems to admoniſh us in the language of the text, *Be ye alſo ready, for in ſuch an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.* Dreadful indeed will be the terrors of that hour to the unprepared ſervant, when ſurpriſed by his Lord; but bleſſed the condition of thoſe whom he ſhall find vigilant in the duties of his ſervice, and employed in pious efforts to merit his favour. To ſuch, welcome will be the tidings that the Lord is at hand; and happier far than the day of their birth, will be that of death. May we reſolve to ſeize and improve the preſent opportunities of life; that we may be prepared for that awful event which is approaching, and may in conſequence inherit

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the bleſſedneſs of thoſe ſervants, whom their Lord, when he cometh, ſhall find watching!

SER-

SERMON X.

On public worſhip.

Preached at opening the New Epiſcopal Chapel in Edinburgh, on Sunday, Oct. 9. 1774.

An OCCASIONAL PRAYER.

O THOU Supreme, Almighty Being, whoſe goodneſs is everlaſting, whoſe providential care extends to all thy creatures, look down from the habitation of thy holineſs, upon us thy ſervants, who are here aſſembled to preſent our ſupplications before thee.

We at this time particularly implore

thy acceptance of the adorations which ſhall be offered in this Houſe of Prayer, which we now dedicate and appropriate to thy ſervice. Vouchſafe to accept this our offering, and to regard with an eye of mercy the ſuppli-cants who here approach thy preſence.

Let the influence of thy Holy Spirit accompany the religious inſtructions and exhortations which ſhall here be delivered, that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and alſo may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the ſame. But if we ſin againſt thee, as there is no man that liveth and ſinneth not, yet if we repent, and make our ſupplications unto thee in this Houſe, and return unto thee with all our heart, and with all our ſoul, then hear thou from heaven, thy dwelling-place, and forgive us our tranſgreſſions wherein we have tranſ-

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greſſed againſt thee. And this we beg for Jeſus Chriſt his ſake; in whoſe holy name and words we further addreſs thee. ------" Our Father which art in heaven, " &c."

PSAL. XCV. 6.

O come, let us worſhip, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our maker.

ON this firſt occaſion of aſſembling within theſe walls, now ſacred to Religion, the homage which we here aſſemble to pay to the adorable Author of our being, ſhould ſeem a proper ſubject for our meditation. For which reaſon, I have ſelected the words of the text, taken from an hymn ſuppoſed to have been an introductory part of divine ſervice in the Jewiſh Temple, and for the ſame purpoſe adopted by our Church.

In diſcourſing on which, I ſhall conſider, *1ſt*, Our obligations to worſhip the Lord our

our Maker; and, 2*dly*, The religious effects conſequent on a due obſervance of this duty.

I. THAT God ought to be worſhipped, is a principle of natural religion, immediately ariſing from an acknowledgement of his exiſtence, in whatever relation we conſider him. For, is he our maker, the Father of the whole family of mankind? he has then a parental right to every expreſſion of filial reſpect and reverence. Is he the Lord, the Sovereign of nature, whoſe dominion extends to the ends of the earth, and to the utmoſt limits of creation, if creation be indeed limited? he has then a juſt claim to univerſal homage, and his authority ought to be acknowledged and revered by us, and all his ſubjects and dependents. Does he, as Ruler of the world, by a powerful, though inviſible hand, conduct all the operations of nature? and is our exiſtence, and our whole happineſs, dependent on his will? we muſt then think it reaſonable to preſent our petitions, and addreſs him for protection and favour. Is he our ſupreme Benefactor, to whoſe

whoſe unſolicited goodneſs we owe our being, and every proviſion made for our well-being, who has been liberal in his favours, and every day confers ſome new, or repeats ſome former bleſſing? our gratitude muſt then acknowledge our obligations to offer up our praiſes and adorations for his goodneſs, and for the wonders he doth for the children of men. Is he the moſt amiable of all beings, in whom all poſſible and conceivable perfections centre, the Parent of good, the Source of all created excellence? he is then worthy of our beſt affections, and every ſentiment of our heart muſt pay homage to him.

Theſe perfections have a natural claim to love and veneration, to all the tribute of praiſe, and to much more than the poor pittance of honour that we can pay to the Sovereign, the Parent, and Guardian of creation. Are reſpect and deference paid even to our fellow-men of ſuperior dignity and character? as much as the Supreme, clothed with majeſty and honour, ſurpaſſes all other beings, ſo much higher title has He to our reverence and veneration. Are the

the expreſſions of a grateful heart due to inferior benefactors? as far as the bleſſings derived from Him, the fountain of all bleſſings, exceed the good offices we receive one from another, ſo much better right has he to our gratitude and praiſe.

But the duty I am now conſidering requires not the aid of any train of reaſoning to recommend and approve it to the calmeſt judgement of the mind. No argument can render it clearer than it appears by its own light. That we ought to worſhip the Lord our maker, by the beſt expreſſions of regard, ſubmiſſion, veneration, and devotion, is as ſelf-evident as the obligation to any of the ſocial duties. We have an intuitive perception of the propriety and rectitude of walking humbly with our God, as well as of doing juſtly, or ſhewing mercy to Men. Reaſon, or the moral principle in us, with a voice, and in a language, hardly to be miſunderſtood, dictates this duty.

And here we may obſerve, that to the duty of Prayer, a principal part of divine worſhip, our Creator ſeems to have added a ſupplemental direction. There is impreſſ-

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ed on the human mind an inſtinctive determination, a natural propenſity to Prayer, which, on ſudden emergencies, acts inſtantaneouſly, without waiting the iſſue of the ſlower counſels of Reaſon. On many occaſions, in ſeaſons of affliction particularly, the heart moves ſpontaneouſly towards God; and, by a mere natural impulſe, without deliberation, we look up to him for protection, and pour out our fears and dangers to him.

This inſtinctive direction of the mind, not given in vain, ſhould ſeem an indication, that we are formed for piety and devotion; from which we cannot depart, without deviating from the line of duty which nature points out. No man, perhaps, could ever totally ſuppreſs in himſelf this propenſion in ſeaſons of ſevere diſtreſs, or at the hour of approaching death. At that awful hour, the Atheiſt no longer finds conſolation in the laboured refinements of philoſophy, no longer leans on the broken reed of abſtruſe ſpeculation, but adopts the ſentiments of nature, lifts up his heart to Heaven in

in ſecret ſupplications, and recommends his ſoul to the great Supporter of his exiſtence.

But not only the impulſe we feel on ſome emergencies, but the univerſal voice of mankind, ſpeaks the ſenſe of nature in this particular. The ſeveral nations of the world, however differing in their cuſtoms, manners, and characters, have in all ages been united in the opinion of an adoration due to their Creator. Into whatever regions we caſt our eyes, we meet with religious ceremonies, altars, temples, or places ſacred to a Deity; in every people we diſcover a reverence of a Supreme Being. If we look back into the remoteſt ages of antiquity, we find, that even in the infancy of the world, men began to call upon the name of the Lord. Noah, we read, and Abraham, and Iſaac, erected altars, without any divine injunction, ſo far as we are informed. The Pagan nations, amidſt all their ignorance and darkneſs, adopted ſome rites of religious worſhip. If you ſearch the world, ſays an eminent Heathen author *, you may find cities

* Plutarch.

cities without wealth, without walls, without princes; but no man ever ſaw a city without a deity, without a temple, and without prayers. Whence it ſhould ſeem, that devotion is natural to the human mind, as univerſal as the belief of a Supreme Being, and as characteriſtic of our ſpecies as reaſon itſelf.

Need I further to obſerve, that the duty of divine worſhip is not only required by the law of reaſon and nature, but that the Chriſtian Lawgiver has added his authority to the natural obligations we were under, and has enjoined his followers to offer up their ſupplications to the throne of God, not only in private addreſſes, but in ſocial and public ſolemnities; and has promiſed his preſence in our religious aſſemblies; and has added alſo an inſtruction not given by nature, that we ſhould offer up our prayers in his name.

II. The worſhip of God is attended with the happieſt effects. It is itſelf virtue, and inſtrumental to virtue. It is to be conſidered, not only as a ſingle act of duty, but as

introductory to every other duty, and the beſt means of forming the mind to univerſal rectitude and goodneſs. Divine worſhip has a natural tendency to ſet God always before us; to bring us under an awful ſenſe of his inſpection; and, by reminding us of the immediate preſence of that Being who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, muſt, if we are at all ſuſceptive of religious impreſſions, check every inclination to vice, and animate us to every virtue. No other method can be conceived more effectual to keep alive in the ſoul a ſenſe of God's ſuperintending providence, and of our dependent ſtate; to familiarize ideas of duty; to open the mind to ſerious reflections, devout ſentiments, and virtuous principles.

We may with truth aſſert, that if men were more regular in their attendance on the duties of devotion, the ſentiments thus frequently infuſed into the mind could ſcarce fail to give a moral tincture to their Manners. They would be more ſubmiſſive and reſigned to the will of Heaven, more juſt and benevolent to men, more indifferent to the ſeducements of the world; their

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paſſions more temperate, their whole conduct more correct. Devout intercourſe with God would in ſome meaſure gradually aſſimilate them to the divine nature, and render them holy as He is holy.

Public worſhip, we may alſo obſerve, may naturally be expected to be promotive of peace and good-will. When we here aſſemble in the duties of devotion, we ought all to conſider ourſelves as allied to each other, as brethren, heirs of the ſame hopes, children of the ſame Father who is in heaven. Here, therefore, every malevolent, every unfriendly paſſion, ſhould ſubſide. When we here ſee the circle of our brethren and fellow-ſupplicants all paying their joint homage and adoration at the throne of grace; all addreſſing the mercy of our general Father, in ſupplications for each other, and for our common ſalvation; and all aſpiring to thoſe manſions of peace and love, where we ſhall, we hope, for ever aſſociate;—let this proſpect, this ſcene of piety, which now preſents itſelf to view; this image, ſuch as earth can afford, of heaven; let it unite us here,

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as there, in the bonds of affection, that we may happily, as brethren, dwell together in unanimity, harmony, and benevolence.

It may appear, then, that religious worſhip has a powerful tendency to impreſs an habitual ſenſe of God's preſence and providence, and to plant and cultivate various virtues and moral affections in the ſoul. Hence the utility of public, ſtated Forms of religion; which are the evident means of preſerving in the world, ſo far as it is preſerved, a public ſenſe of morality and duty. Were no public ſervices of religion obſerved, and no times or places appropriated to that purpoſe, men would be leſs attentive to the duties they owe to God and to each other; and would be ſo abſorbed by the diſſipations or cares of the world, that they would pay little regard to that care which is moſt needful, the care of their Salvation. Mankind, in general, formed more for active than contemplative life, find ſo little leiſure or inclination for reflection, that public and frequent memorials of their dependence upon God are neceſſary to preſerve in their minds an habitual remembrance

brance of their Creator, and of the Duty they owe him. For if inattention to the Deity, and an indifference to piety and virtue, be the ſubjects of general complaint, even now amidſt all the opportunities of regular, ſocial worſhip; may it not be preſumed, that, without thoſe monitions, men would be much more forgetful of their religious obligations, and that a long train of immoral and fatal conſequences would enſue?

But this point need not be farther inſiſted on: it is admitted even by the adverſaries of religion and public worſhip, when they aſſert them to be only ſtate-engines, or political inſtitutions, deviſed by Legiſlators to awe mankind into an obſervance of thoſe duties which are eſſential to public peace, and their common intereſts. This aſſertion is an argument in favour of the doctrine it would oppoſe: for if religion and ſocial worſhip be neceſſary and eſſential, or even conducive, to the public happineſs; certain it is, they muſt have the approbation, and be worthy of the injunction of that Being, whoſe object, in all his diſpenſations, is the happineſs of his Creatures.

I have hitherto conſidered the duty of divine worſhip in general, without pointing out the peculiar excellence of that mode of worſhip, of which your attendance in this place ſpeaks your approbation. But as this may ſeem unneceſſary, permit me rather to obſerve, in what high eſtimation we ought to hold the favour of Providence, in aſſigning our lot in a land, happy in a conſtitution, and a ſyſtem of laws, the moſt favourable in the world to the rights of human nature; where we are permitted, in religious matters, to diſſent from public eſtabliſhment; where the principles of toleration are underſtood, and acknowledged; where the invaluable bleſſings of religious liberty are enjoyed to an extent not known to other nations, nor till of late poſſeſſed by our own. Nature, or rather its Author, never meant to eſtabliſh an uniformity of opinions. He has not given to all men the ſame intellectual diſcernment, nor placed us all in the ſame commodious ſituation for the diſcovery of truth; religious objects, conſequently, muſt be obſerved from different points of view, and appear in different lights and

and poſitions. A diverſity of ſentiments is evidently the plan of Nature, and is not to be conſidered as an evil, except when we render it ſuch by diſcordant paſſions.

But very different from the genius and characteriſtic virtue of our religion is every degree of Diſcord on account of ſuch diverſity. Would we evince the ſuperior excellence of the doctrines and devotional rites of our church? let us attempt it by the beſt of arguments,—by appealing to their moral effects, their ſuperior influence on our lives and manners. *Let the tree*, according to our Saviour's expreſſion, *be known by its fruit*. By this we may beſt eſtimate its value. This will be our beſt vindication. By ſuch arguments we may, we ought, earneſtly, too earneſtly we cannot, contend for the honour of our holy profeſſion. Religious altercations have ſeldom been deciſive, or produced any other conviction, than that where opinions differ, affections are apt to be at variance; and that the true ſpirit of religion is often loſt amidſt the contentions about it.

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But to return from this digreſſion: If it appears, that divine worſhip is both a primary and an inſtrumental duty of religion; if it naturally reminds us of, what we often forget, our dependence upon God for all we have, and all we are, for every preſent enjoyment, and all our future hopes; if it tends to cultivate in us, what we too much neglect, a benevolence of heart, and a diſpoſition to every virtue;—it highly concerns us, not to be wanting to ourſelves in a duty which is itſelf a reaſonable ſervice, of intrinſic obligation and rectitude, and comes further recommended by the happieſt influence on our minds and manners.

To God, then, the Sovereign of nature, the greateſt, wiſeſt, beſt of beings, be it our care to pay our frequent homage. It is the duty he requires, and we are under every obligation to pay. But let us remember, when we approach him in the duties of his ſervice, that we muſt worſhip him in the beſt manner we can; and the beſt will fall infinitely ſhort of what is due to his perfections. We muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth, with the underſtanding, and with the

the heart. In vain ſhould we approach him with forms and appearances, or with the moſt humiliating attitudes, unaccompanied with internal reverence; in vain ſhould we fall down and kneel before the Lord our maker, unleſs we at the ſame time humble and proſtrate the mind.

For this ſolemn duty let us always prepare ourſelves, by previouſly impreſſing on the mind the moſt reſpectable ideas of that infinite Being whom we here addreſs; and during our attendance on his ſervice, let us retain an awful ſenſe of the majeſty of his preſence. As often as we here aſſemble, to preſent ourſelves before the Moſt High God, let us leave, as much as may be, the world and its concernments, all ideas of its cares or pleaſures, behind us: let us, on the wings of holy Contemplation, elevate our hearts to heaven; nor let us ſuffer them, till we depart hence, to deſcend to the things of the earth.

Permit me further to obſerve, that when we return from the duties of this holy aſſembly, we are ſtill to retain the religious impreſſions which we have here received; we

are not to retire from God; we are ſtill to hold a ſacred intercourſe, by an attention to him in our whole conduct; by acknowledging him in all our ways; by conſidering his will as our invariable guide, his providence the object of our dependence, his favour the aim of our ambition; and by rendering him continual homage in the uniform obedience of a good life.

To this good end, this obedience, and the felicity conſequent upon it, may this Houſe of Prayer now erected prove happily ſubſervient: may it be the means, under Providence, of recommending and promoting rational piety; of reclaiming the ſinner, and confirming the juſt; of elucidating the doctrines, and enforcing the duties, of the Chriſtian ſyſtem; and of exhibiting a juſt portrait of religion, which, to be eſteemed, requires only to be fairly repreſented; and when viewed in its native form and features, adorned with every moral grace and virtue, and not diſhonoured with the garb of ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm, muſt to every intellectual eye appear in perfect beauty,—the object of univerſal veneration.

MAY that ſupreme, all-propitious Being; to whoſe ſervice this our Temple is dedicated, and without the light of whoſe countenance, their labour is but loſt that built it; may he vouchſafe to favour the pious hopes of its Founders, and to proſper this work of our hands upon us, by ſhedding down his bleſſings, and imparting to every faithful worſhipper within theſe walls the effectual, though imperceptible, influence of his Grace. May the ſeed of true religion, here ſown, as in good ground, ſpring up,—and, watered with the dew of heaven, be abundantly productive of the fruits of the Sprit, love, peace, gentleneſs, meekneſs, and every virtue. And may we cooperate with the ſacred influence. May our Lives be as pure, as our religion is holy. May the piety of the ſupplicants be the principal decoration of this ſtructure. May the beauty of holineſs appear equally in our Manners, and in the conduct of our devotions. May we here find the way that leadeth to everlaſting life. And may this, which is now none other than the houſe of God, be to all of us the gate of Heaven.

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SERMON XI.

Internal Excellence of the Goſpel.

PHIL. iii. 8.

I count all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord.

THE peculiar excellence of the Chriſtian doctrine, and its conformity to the dictates of the beſt and moſt improved reaſon, is one argument of its divine original, without which, all external evidence would be defective and inſufficient. It is indeed the privilege of the goſpel to come recommended to us by various concurring atteſtations of its divine authority; to be ſupported by every evidence that the nature of revelation will admit, and to be no leſs eminently confirmed and diſtinguiſhed by the

the intrinſic excellence of its doctrines and precepts, than by the exterior evidence of miracles and prophecies.

My preſent deſign is, to ſhew, that the Chriſtian doctrine is worthy of that God from whoſe mercies to mankind it claims its high original; and to illuſtrate its peculiar excellence, in the following particulars, viz. as it exhibits the moſt juſt repreſentation of the nature of the Deity, preſcribes the moſt rational worſhip, preſents to us the pureſt and moſt perfect moral precepts, and propoſes the moſt effectual motives to the practice of univerſal virtue and goodneſs: for in theſe particulars muſt conſiſt the principal excellence of any religious ſyſtem.

I. The excellence of that doctrine which the Son of God publiſhed to the world may appear from its juſt deſcriptions of the divine nature. For the goſpel informs us, that God is infinite in all perfections, all-ſufficient, ſelf-ſubſiſtent, almighty, omnipreſent, and eternal; that he is a pure ſpirit,—an opinion not generally received in the Heathen world; and to be worſhipped

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in ſpirit and in truth,—a doctrine unknown, or unobſerved, by the Jews. He is repreſented as the only true God, infinite in majeſty, unlimited in his eſſence, unſearchable in his providence, incomprehenſible to his creatures, too high for our ſpeculations, too exalted for deſcription, infinitely great and excellent, beyond whatever our conceptions can form, filling heaven and earth with his preſence, including all ſpace, and contained in none.

He is deſcribed to have been from everlaſting, infinitely happy in himſelf, and the inexhauſtible fountain of univerſal and endleſs happineſs to his creatures. His power is ſet forth, in that he is ſaid to be Lord of heaven and earth; that with him all things are poſſible; that he has heaven for his throne, and earth for his footſtool; and that angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, are the ſervants that do his pleaſure; that his power created all things; that his providence ſuſtaineth all things; and that univerſal nature is obedient to his word. The ſcriptures repreſent him as infinitely elevated above the higheſt of his creatures,

creatures, but not neglecting or deſpiſing the meaneſt; far exalted above all bleſſing and praiſe, yet accepting our moſt imperfect prayers and praiſes, when offered with a faithful and upright heart. There alſo his peculiar care, his paternal concern, for us his children, is abundantly diſplayed; foraſmuch as the very hairs of our head are ſaid to be all numbered. His compaſſion to ſinners appears in his ſending his Son into the world, to call them to repentance. He is not repreſented ſevere, cruel, and vindictive, the object of awful terror, to be appeaſed therefore with human ſacrifices, like the gods of the Heathen; but as the Father of mercies, the God of peace and love, and of all conſolation.

Whence it may appear, that the repreſentation or portrait of the divine nature, as exhibited in the ſcripture, far from being diſcordant with our natural notions of the Deity, is ſuch as reaſon muſt immediately approve, and admit to be in every reſpect worthy of his ſupreme perfection.

II.

II. THE next inquiry is, Whether the worſhip inſtituted in the goſpel, and required to be paid, is ſuch as is worthy to be received? And here many excellent things may be deſervedly ſpoken of the Chriſtian inſtitution. For the worſhip of the heart, not of the lip, is what Chriſt every where enjoins. He requires us to adore our Maker in the ſecret receſſes of our ſoul; not to pray ſtanding in the corners of the ſtreets, with oſtentatious pride, but to breathe out the fervour of our heart in privacy and retirement; to enter into our cloſet, and let our devotions ſilently aſcend to him who ſeeth in ſecret. The ſincerity of the heart, the purity of the mind, the fervour of our affections, productive of genuine goodneſs, is the incenſe which we are inſtructed to offer up to Heaven. To worſhip God in humility; to approach him with reverence; not to truſt in our own righteouſneſs, but in his manifold and great mercies; to acknowledge and bewail our own ſinfulneſs; to ſuppreſs all opinion of religious merit; to diſclaim all worthineſs on our part, and with awful adoration to implore the mercies of a

gracious Creator,—is the ſpiritual and rational worſhip of the Goſpel.

If, then, ſincerity of heart, and humility of mind, become the ſupplicant; if God ought to be worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth, not with mere bodily ſervice; if a pious fervour is a fit property of our addreſſes to the throne of grace; if to proſtrate ourſelves before God with all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with all our mind, be the reaſonable duty of a creature to his Creator, then the Chriſtian doctrine, with reſpect to the nature or mode of religious worſhip, is ſuch as may be juſtly deemed of God.

III. But further, the Chriſtian inſtitution teaches and enjoins the pureſt Morality. It compriſes all the beſt precepts and rules of life which had been delivered by the wiſeſt of the ancient philoſophers, but improved and refined, as it were, to the higheſt purity, and unmingled with the ſuperſtitious and abſurd opinions which had adulterated and debaſed their ſyſtems.

The moſt ſpotleſs purity, the moſt immaculate holineſs, is the rule of our actions, and the meaſure of our duty. Thus we are com-

commanded to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. To this purpoſe is that divine ſermon on the mount; wherein is contained the moſt ſublime virtue which Heaven could preſcribe, or man can practiſe; not an exterior, formal ſanctity, but a ſincere, unfeigned purity of heart, conſtant and faithful to its duty. Hence it is, that not the commiſſion only, but even the intention or conception of guilt is criminal. The ſource and ſpring of our actions, the heart, is hereby ſecured. So pure, ſo ſpiritual, is the genius of our religion.

It, in a particular manner, recommends the virtue of charity or benevolence, which, according to the plan of the goſpel, ought to be the leading principle, the animating ſpirit of every Chriſtian ſociety, diſpoſing all men to perform the duties and kind offices they owe one to another. Chriſtianity is the moſt charitable, benevolent inſtitution in the world; one proof, among others, that it is derived from the beſt and moſt benevolent of Beings. All malignity and revenge are wholly forbidden, and the moſt extenſive

extenſive love, the moſt diffuſive benevolence is required; benevolence, not reſtricted to the narrow limits of a party, ſect, or nation, but extending itſelf over the face of the whole earth, even to our enemies. No difference in opinions, no diverſity of intereſts, not even injurious treatment, muſt extinguiſh Chriſtian charity. Nor is it this ſingle virtue which we ſtand engaged to perform; but *whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are pure, honeſt, juſt, and of good report*, theſe we are to practiſe; not from vanity or oſtentation, not to receive praiſe of men, but from ſentiments of duty, and a principle of obedience to God. *All things whatſoever we would that men ſhould do unto us, even ſo we muſt do unto them*; and the leaſt commandment muſt not be broken.

Such is the lovely form, ſuch the amiable ſpirit, of the Chriſtian inſtitution; ſuch its benevolent principles; ſuch the rational duties it enjoins. No religion ever preſcribed better rules of conduct; none differing from it can be ſo good. It is not in the power of human underſtanding to deviſe a ſyſtem of duties more conſonant to our natural notions

tions of God, or more conducive to the happineſs and well-being of Man. And this alone may ſuggeſt to us its divine original: for a religion which enjoins no other duties, but ſuch as are comformable to the eternal laws of God and nature, and whoſe ſole aim and tendency is, to promote univerſal goodneſs, and virtue, and happineſs, muſt either be immediately derived from God, or at leaſt muſt be agreeable to him, and worthy of him.

IV. LASTLY, the Goſpel preſents the moſt powerful motives of future retribution, in order to invite or compel us, as far as free agents can be compelled, to the obſervance and practice of religion and virtue. Virtue may be amiable, worthy to be choſen, fit to be practiſed, at all times, by all rational beings; its ways may be ways of pleaſantneſs, and all its paths chiefly lead to peace. But yet, ſince vice has likewiſe its pleaſures, the world its allurements, and we walk in the midſt of temptations that are always offering to corrupt and ſeduce, it is fit that rewards and puniſhments ſhould be annexed to the obe-

obedience required: not that the thing formed has any right to claim reward, or with-hold obedience from him that formed it; but the wiſdom of a lawgiver beſt conſults the honour and authority of his laws by ſuch ſanctions as moſt effectually operate in ſecuring obedience.

Hope and fear are the great ſprings of human actions; and nothing can take faſter hold of our nature than the hope of everlaſting happineſs, or the fears of future puniſhment. Theſe are the moſt powerful and effectual enforcements of obedience that can poſſibly be offered to mankind. To angels, or beings of ſuperior rank, ſenſe of duty may be an adequate and ſufficient motive of action; but man, frail and corrupt, will have reſpect to the recompence of reward; for which reaſon, life and immortality were brought to light by the goſpel.

In the dark, benighted ages of Heathen ignorance, before the Sun of Righteouſneſs aroſe, and his light ſhone upon the world, mankind might entertain ſuſpicions and doubts concerning a future exiſtence; they knew not, when they deſcended into the grave,

grave, whither it would convey them, or whether it might not put a period to their being. But now we know that we ſhall riſe again, and give an account of our works. Now we may with alacarity enter into the ways of holineſs, and, with unwearied perſeverance, run the race that is ſet before us; ſince the righteous, we are aſſured, will obtain the prize of life eternal; and death, the terror of our nature, will be to the righteous an introduction to heaven, and will open to them the gate of everlaſting bliſs.

If, then, rewards and puniſhments are the proper ſanctions of the divine laws, if their authority is thereby beſt preſerved ſacred and inviolate;—the doctrine which the world's Redeemer taught is worthy of God, foraſmuch as it propoſes and enforces the moſt powerful and effectual conſiderations to encourage and animate us to virtue, and to diſſuade and deter from vice. If, then, our religion comes recommended to us by various concurring proofs of its authority; if its external evidences are confirmed and ſupported by the internal characters of its truth, by the rectitude,—purity, and excellence,

lence, of its doctrines and duties; — then have we the fulleſt confirmation of its divine original, that the nature of revelation will admit; then may we be aſſured, that God hath ſpoken unto us by his Son; and then ought we alſo to conſider well the neceſſity of conforming our lives to the rules of the goſpel; of letting our manners be as pure as our religion is holy; of walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called; and of our letting our Converſation be as becometh the goſpel of Chriſt.

SER.

SERMON XII.

Aſcenſion.

Acts i. 9.

And when he had ſpoken theſe things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their ſight.

AS every circumſtance relative to the redemption of mankind is a proper object of a Chriſtian's meditations, ſolemn ſeaſons have been therefore ſet apart for the commemoration of our bleſſed Saviour's incarnation, paſſion, and reſurrection.

What I ſhall conſider at preſent is his aſcenſion into heaven; and ſhall obſerve, 1*ſt*, The circumſtances of our Lord's aſcenſion; and, 2*dly*, The evidences we have of its truth.

I. Our bleſſed Lord, we are informed, after his reſurrection, ſhewed himſelf alive to his diſciples by many infallible proofs; admitting them to familiar converſe; allowing them to handle him, that they might be ſure they were not deceived by any illuſive appearance; illuminating their underſtandings; explaining to them ſubjects of which, before his death, he had given general intimations; expounding to them out of the prophets, the things concerning himſelf, and pertaining to the kingdom of God; and promiſing to be with them, by the influence of his Spirit, always, even unto the end. Our Saviour, we read, was ſeen by his diſciples, after his reſurrection, for the ſpace of forty days. But whether, during this interval between his reſurrection and final aſcenſion, he continued conſtantly upon earth with his diſciples and followers, or whether he aſcended on the morning of the reſurrection, and afterwards appeared only occaſionally, as often as their conviction or inſtruction might require, has been matter of doubt.

But however this was, when our bleſſed Lord

Lord had ſufficiently inſtructed his diſciples, he aſcended finally from them, and was received up into heaven; was conveyed from earth to the higheſt ſtate of glory, and the moſt immediate preſence of the Deity. For though the Divine Being is every where equally preſent; though he fills all ſpace, and inhabits immenſity; and cannot, ſtrictly ſpeaking, exiſt eſſentially in one place more than another; — yet the heavenly region where he has thought fit to unveil his glory, and manifeſt his preſence in the moſt conſpicuous manner, and which he has appointed to be the reſidence of numberleſs hoſts of angels, the ſervants that do his pleaſure, is in ſcripture ſaid to be his throne, and his habitation; and thither it was that our bleſſed Lord aſcended. And though there may be different regions of happineſs, ſuited to the various orders of ſpiritual beings, (as St Paul's being caught up to the third heaven ſhould ſeem to imply); yet ſince our Saviour is ſaid to be gone into the holy place, even heaven itſelf, to appear before the preſence of God, to have been made higher than the heavens, and to have

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aſcended far above the heavens,—there is good reaſon to underſtand heaven in the text in the moſt exalted ſenſe of the word, as the ſeat of ſupreme felicity, and the moſt conſpicuous and auguſt reſidence of the divine Glory.

The aſcenſion of the Meſſiah was, we may obſerve, prefigured under the Jewiſh diſpenſation. According to the author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, the high-prieſt's entrance into the holy of holies, the innermoſt and moſt ſacred part of the temple, performed once in a year, on the ſolemn day of atonement, did preſignify, that Chriſt, the Meſſiah, ſhould once ſuffer death, as a propitiation for the ſins of mankind, and after that aſcend into the heaven of heavens. The Jews believed, that the tabernacle was meant to repreſent this world, and the holy of holies to typify the higheſt heaven. Wherefore, as the high-prieſt did once in the year offer a ſacrifice for the ſins of the people, and with the blood thereof enter into the holy of holies; ſo the Meſſiah was, by the one oblation of himſelf once offered, to enter into the holy place

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not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and there to preſent the ſacrifice he offered, and his blood that was ſhed, for the ſins of the world.

II. I PROCEED to obſerve the evidence we have of the truth of our Lord's aſcenſion.

Though it is not poſſible we ſhould acquire the ſame certainty of this fact, as thoſe whoſe Senſes informed them of its truth, (the moſt unexceptionable tradition or teſtimony being undoubtedly weaker than the evidence of ſenſe); yet if we have now all the evidence that any remote fact is capable of, and ſuch evidence as never fails to command aſſent in other caſes, reaſon will require our aſſent alſo in this. If, then, it appears, that the witneſſes of our Lord's aſcenſion were perſons of unqueſtionable integrity and underſtanding; that we can neither doubt their information, nor their veracity; that they had opportunities ſufficient to be aſſured of the fact, and honeſty incapable of forging and propagating falſehood; that they could not be themſelves deceived,

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nor were capable of practiſing deception upon others; and that their accounts are faithfully tranſmitted down to us;—then have we all the evidence which a fact ſo remote can poſſibly admit.

That the evangelical records, or books of the New Teſtament, which contain thoſe accounts, are genuine and authentic, written in the apoſtolic age, by thoſe perſons, the followers and diſciples of Chriſt, under whoſe names we receive them, appears from the teſtimony of many ancient writers, who were cotemporary, or nearly ſo, with the authors of thoſe books; not only among Chriſtians, who frequently quote and tranſcribe parts of them in their works, but among the avowed Adverſaries of Chriſtianity, Jewiſh and Heathen writers, who never called their authencity in queſtion, but expreſsly admit and mention them as the works of thoſe ſacred authors to whom they are aſcribed, though they had an averſion to the religious ſyſtem they taught, and their prejudices and intereſt urged them to diſprove it.

That theſe ſacred writings are, moreover, faithfully

faithfully tranſmitted down to us, without any material corruption or adulteration, appears from a variety of circumſtances; from the high eſtimation and reverence in which they were ever held by Chriſtians, who always regarded them as the ſacred rule of their faith and conduct; from their being frequently and publicly read in Chriſtian aſſemblies, as part of their public devotions; from the early tranſlation of them into moſt of the known languages of the world, and the agreement and harmony of ſuch tranſlations; from the quotations made from them, ſtill remaining in ancient writers; from the conſtant appeals made to them by various ſects of Chriſtians, in matters of controverſy; for which reaſon, there could be no material adulteration inſerted, either by the artifice of particular ſects, or by common combination and conſent. So that there is no room to doubt, but that the books of the New Teſtament are authentic, written by the perſons to whom they are aſcribed; and that likewiſe they have been tranſmitted down to us, through a long ſucceſſion

ceſſion of ages, in their genuine and original purity.

We may, in the next place, obſerve, that the Apoſtles muſt have had a clear conviction of the certainty of our bleſſed Lord's aſcenſion. In this, their conſtant attendance on him made it altogether impoſſible they ſhould be deceived. For his aſcenſion was not quick and ſudden, ſuch as might poſſibly carry the appearance of illuſion, but it was ſlow and gradual: for when he had ſpoken, while they beheld, which implies their fixed and ſteady view of his aſcenſion, while they were purſuing him with eager eyes, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their ſight. And while they looked ſtedfaſtly towards heaven as he went up, behold two men, inhabitants probably of the heavenly region whither he was aſcended, ſtood by them in white apparel, and ſaid, *Ye men of Galilee, why ſtand ye gazing towards heaven? This ſame Jeſus which is taken from you, ſhall ſo come, in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven.*

The apoſtles could not here be deceived by any artifice or illuſion. For, if ſeeing the

the everlaſting doors of heaven opened to receive the King of glory; if ſeeing him aſcend, and make the light his garment, and the clouds the chariot of his triumph; if having the evidence of ſight confirmed by the voice of angels;—if theſe are convincing circumſtances of a true, real aſcenſion, then were the apoſtles ſufficiently aſſured of what they ſo reſolutely aſſerted.

And as a corroborative proof, that when he was taken from them, and a cloud received him out of their ſight, there was no deception or impoſition on the ſenſes, they were in a few days convinced by the moſt ſenſible effects, when they found themſelves veſted, as he had promiſed, with miraculous powers, and were enabled to execute his command of teaching all nations, by the gift conferred on them, of ſpeaking in all languages. They could then no longer doubt, that his prediction was verified; that he was gone to the Father, and had all power committed to him, both in heaven and earth.

But further, as the apoſtles were ſufficiently aſſured of the truth of our Saviour's aſcenſion, ſo did they tranſmit a faithful ac-

count of it to ſucceeding ages. For, beſides the incredibility of ſuppoſing a few illiterate perſons capable of planning and conducting an impoſition of that nature and conſequence, which, they might be ſure, would not be implicitly received, they diſcover, in their narration, all the internal marks and evidences of veracity, all the characters of artleſs, undiſguiſed probity, and impartial regard for truth, that any writings can poſſibly be ſuppoſed to contain. They record their own errors with a plain and honeſt integrity; they relate, not only the meaneſs of their birth, condition, and circumſtances, but their ignorance, their prejudices, their ambition, their mutual contentions, and the reproofs they received from their Lord. The undiſguiſed relation of the denial of one apoſtle, of the treachery of another, the unbelief of a third, and of the deſertion of them all, affords no ſmall preſumption, that they had no other intereſt at heart than that of truth.

But ſhould we ſuppoſe them capable of propagating an impoſture in the world, which yet the diſcerning jealouſy of the Jews

Jews would have rendered impracticable, what proſpects could invite, what conceivable motives tempt them to project or carry on the fraud? Was the doctrine of a ſuffering, crucified Maſter, likely to procure eaſe, or affluence, or honour, to his diſciples? *Marvel not if the world hate you,* was their maſter's caution; *the ſervant is not greater than his maſter, nor the diſciple than his Lord.* They ſaw what ſeverities the Jews had inflicted on the Founder of Chriſtianity; what expectations, then, of favour or ſucceſs could they form, by aſſerting the viſible aſcenſion, and reception into heaven, of him whom their countrymen with wicked hands had crucified and ſlain? This might prove fatal to thoſe who ſhould upbraid a nation with a fact which would fix and perpetuate reproach and infamy upon it, but never could ingratiate or recommend them.

This the apoſtles well knew; for their Lord had informed them, that the time was coming, that whoſoever ſhould kill them would think that he did God ſervice. And yet, notwithſtanding they ſaw not only oppoſition and perſecution, not only bonds and

and impriſonment, but even death, in all its various forms of terror, awaiting the declaration of ſo unwelcome a truth, they perſiſted in their teſtimony with an unſhaken conſtancy; and with the moſt perſevering and determined aſſiduity, continued to publiſh, that Chriſt was aſcended up into heaven, far above all principalities and powers. All the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, St John only excepted, ſealed their teſtimony with their blood, and laid down their lives in confirmation of what they atteſted and taught.

As, then, we have the unanimous teſtimony of perſons, who, by the evidence of their own ſight, confirmed by the voice of angels, were aſſured of our Saviour's aſcenſion; as they were perſons incapable of forming and conducting any artful deſign; as it was a doctrine, which, if falſe, could be productive of no advantage to the propagators of it; and as they perſevered in aſſerting it, in deſpite of all the tortures that cruelty could deviſe, or power inflict; we have the fulleſt evidence of the certainty of

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our Saviour's aſcenſion that the nature of the fact can admit, or in reaſon we can require.

I SHALL conclude with ſome inferences ſuggeſted by this doctrine.

1*ſt*, The aſcenſion of our Lord into heaven is to be conſidered as an indubitably concluſive evidence of the truth of his doctrine, and of his divine miſſion and authority. If we could continue diffident of his pretenſions and character, after all the atteſtations given, all the evidences of a miraculous and divine power exhibited in his life, and in his death, yet his viſible aſcent and reception into glory muſt extinguiſh all doubts, and place the truth of his doctrine and miſſion above all exception. For it is utterly inconſiſtent with the character and perfections of the Supreme Being, to mark with his approbation, in ſo conſpicuous and miraculous a manner, one who, unauthoriſed, had aſſumed a divine commiſſion, and, under an unuſurped authority, had delivered doctrines

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and precepts which were not agreeable to his Will.

2*dly*, If Chriſt is aſcended into heaven, then have we a perpetual patron and advocate there, to plead our cauſe, to intercede in our favour, and to render our Supreme Judge propitious to all that are truly penitent. We may be aſſured, that he will not fail to aſk thoſe bleſſings which he purchaſed with the effuſion of his blood. What may we not hope for from the interceſſion of ſo compaſſionate and powerful a mediator, if we endeavour to purify our minds from all iniquity, and render ourſelves worthy of his interceſſion?

Laſtly, The doctrine of our Saviour's aſcenſion may adminiſter abundant matter of conſolation and holy joy to us his followers, who ought to conſider his aſcenſion as the earneſt and pledge of our own. For thus he aſſures his diſciples, *I go to prepare a place for you; and will come again, and receive you up to myſelf; that where I am, there ye may be alſo.* This promiſe he will undoubtedly fulfil to all the diſciples of his righteouſneſs; and

and at his laſt coming down from heaven, in the ſame manner as he went up to heaven, will change our vile bodies, that they may be like unto his glorious body, and will ſet us at his own right hand in heavenly places.

We have the beſt grounds for dependence on his promiſe, ſince his other predictions were verified and completed. He foretold his own reſurrection and aſcenſion, and he foretold ours; the one to happen in a ſhort time, the other not till the final conſummation of all things. He himſelf roſe from the dead, and aſcended into heaven, according to his own prediction; and we cannot need a more certain and undoubted pledge, that our corruptible bodies ſhall likewiſe in due time put on incorruption; that he will receive us to himſelf; and that where he is, we ſhall be alſo.

Let this hope, then, encourage and animate us to look up to heaven, and to have our converſation there. Let us not ſuffer our minds to be chained down to the concernments of this life; but let us elevate them often to higher objects, to things ce-

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leſtial and eternal. Let us often, on the wings of holy contemplation, follow our Lord and Saviour; and in heart and mind aſcend, whither he is gone before us, and where our ſouls, when unfettered from this world, will, we hope, dwell with him, amidſt fulneſs of joy, to eternal ages.

SER.

SERMON XIII.

On Divine Grace and Human Co-operation.

PHIL. ii. 12. 13.

Work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.

OPinions have been divided in the Chriſtian church, concerning the extent, influence, and efficacy, of Divine Grace, and the power and liberty of the Human Will. Some have aſſerted, that in the preſent degenerate ſtate of human nature, it is not poſſible for us, by our own exertions, to act any effectual part in the work of our ſalvation; that divine grace does all, and we can

do nothing for ourſelves; that the Spirit of God moves the ſprings of action in us by a ſecret, unfelt, but a powerful and irreſiſtible hand; that he acts upon the mind, not indeed like an impetuous torrent, violently and viſibly bearing down our liberty of will, but as a ſmooth and gentle ſtream, which, with an effectual, tho' imperceptible force, carries us along with it; that all our virtues and good actions derive, conſequently, their whole merit from his agency, and are the produce of his operations.

But, according to this opinion, we are mere machines or inſtruments in the hands of a ſuperior agent; our beſt performances, conſequently, can have no moral value, nor be intitled to approbation or reward. For what reward, what approbation, can we claim for actions which are not ours, but wrought and produced in us by a ſuperior direction?

On the contrary, others, by aſſerting the unreſtricted, uninfluenced freedom of the will, and our entire and abſolute ability of chuſing good or evil, have been thought to derogate from the power and efficacy

efficacy of a divine grace. For certain it is, that nature, unaided by grace, is not of itſelf ſufficient to holineſs. The corruption of our nature is a bias that inclines us to vice; a principal above nature is requiſite to counteract this propenſion, and draw us to virtue.

The ſcripture accordingly informs us, that we are not ſufficient of ourſelves, but that our ſufficiency is of God; that without him we can do nothing; that it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do. This corruption and depravation of human nature is not a diſcovery that we owe to Revelation; it was always the general ſenſe of mankind; the beſt and wiſeſt of the Heathens have obſerved, acknowledged, and lamented it; we all but too much feel it in ourſelves, and may obſerve it in others.

But, notwithſtanding it is admitted, that our ſufficiency is of God, and that it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do; yet we are not to be merely paſſive under the divine influences: ſome part muſt belong to ourſelves in the work of our ſalvation. Why elſe are we exhorted not to receive

ceive the grace of God in vain? why forbidden to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit? why commanded to work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling? and to what end are all the precepts and exhortations of the ſcriptures? There is therefore, doubtleſs, required a joint efficiency and co-operation of the divine aſſiſtance, and our own agency, to the accompliſhment of our ſalvation.

This idea is expreſſed in the words of the text; where the apoſtle does not ſay, Work out your ſalvation yourſelves, for you have no need of divine grace; nor does he ſay, on the other hand, The divine grace does all, and therefore you need do nothing yourſelves; but, aſcribing to each its proper office, he ſays, Work out your own ſalvation, becauſe divine grace gives you power ſo to do.

I ſhall in this diſcourſe conſider the Extent of divine grace, and human liberty, and point out the diſtinct province of each; and ſhew in what reſpects our good actions are to be attributed to the Supreme Being, and how far they are to be aſcribed to ourſelves.

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In the following reſpects, then, our actions may be aſcribed to God.——Firſt, From God, the original author of every good gift, we derive all our powers; and on his ſuſtaining hand we depend for the preſervation and exerciſe of them. All our intentions, determinations, and actions, though under the immediate direction of our will, yet are exerted under him, without whoſe concurrence we can neither act, nor think, nor move, nor have our being. As God, then, originally imparted, and ſtill continues to ſupport, our powers of acting, our actions may in one ſenſe, or ultimately, be aſcribed to him.

But beſides thoſe powers granted us by Nature, together with our being, God is pleaſed to illuminate our minds by the immediate aids and influences of his Holy Spirit. The nature of theſe influences, and their mode of operation on the underſtanding, we cannot aſcertain with preciſion; but they ſhould ſeem to conſiſt, in invigorating our intellectual powers; or in arranging our ideas in ſuch order, and placing them in ſuch a light, that we may have a clearer

clearer diſcernment of religious doctrines or duties than we ſhould otherwiſe acquire; or in recalling to our conſideration important and forgotten truths, and giving them a deeper impreſſion on the mind.

But further; the Deity not only aids our underſtandings, but influences alſo our wills and affections, by preſenting to them the moſt powerful motives, by operating on our hopes and fears, ſetting before us future inflictions and rewards, ſuggeſting pious ſentiments, prompting us to virtuous reſolutions, communicating inward aſſiſtance and ability to all the purpoſes of holineſs and obedience, and diſpoſing our hearts to the reception of divine truths. As God, in the former caſe, illuminates our underſtandings, by opening, as it were, the eye of the ſoul, and giving us a clear proſpect and diſcernment of our duty, and its obligations; ſo here he influences and bends our inclinations to the obſervance of duty, by powerful motives; motives that operate on the mind, not indeed with a compulſive force, but with all the force that can be offered to the liberty of moral agents; all the force

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that is conſiſtent with the nature of duty; all the force that can attend admonition, exhortation, conviction.

The opinion and belief of a ſupernatural aſſiſtance is ſo reaſonable, ſo conſonant to our ideas of the divine goodneſs, and of human frailty, that philoſophers, even in the Heathen world, were ſenſible how much it was wanted, and have expreſsly aſſerted, that without divine aſſiſtance, no man could make a progreſs either in wiſdom or virtue. What Reaſon ſuggeſted to them, Revelation has aſcertained to us, which repreſents us as temples and habitations of the Holy Spirit.

It may appear, then, what ſhare may properly be aſcribed to God in the production of our good works; and it is eaſy to diſcover, what remains on our part, and is required from us to do for ourſelves. The Supreme Being does not over-rule our liberty; nor, like a deſpotic ſovereign, chain down our will to his determinations; but, as a friend, addreſſes us, and prevails by the gentle force of rational and moral influence. He firſt gives us ſufficient powers and abilities to act; and then invites us to a

right

right exertion of thoſe powers, by offering the moſt effectual inducements, by preſenting to our view the reaſonableneſs, the amiableneſs, the obligations, the happineſs, of religious obedience. He enables, admoniſhes, and exhorts us, to diſcharge our various duties; we ought to attend to his admonitions, and comply with his influences. He furniſhes the means of action, and motives for acting; in conſequence of theſe, it is our province to deliberate, to determine, and to act.

God does not irreſiſtibly turn the balance of our will, nor abſolutely determine our actions; for then they would be his actions, not ours; he would be the ſole agent, we only the inſtruments he employs. Whatever may be the nature of the divine influences, or their manner of operation on the mind; however our underſtandings may be illuminated, or our affections rectified,—we may be aſſured, that we retain our moral liberty; that our intentions and actions are left, generally, to our own determination; that we have the government of ourſelves; and that our whole behaviour is at our own diſpoſal;

diſpoſal; which circumſtance alone it is that can render us accountable for it.

Our Saviour, in order to deſcribe the influence and operation of divine grace upon his followers, repreſents it under the ſimilitude of a vine and its branches. *I am the vine*, ſays he, *ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much fruit.* As there is a natural, vital union between the vine and the branches, ſo is there a ſpiritual union between Chriſt and his true diſciples, on which the communication of his grace and ſpirit depends. The myſtical vine conveys to every branch a vital principle, a conſtant ſupply of ſpiritual nutriment; it belongs to us the branches, in virtue of theſe communications from the root, to contribute our part to the production of fruit.

The ſame idea is illuſtrated in the parable of the Sower; where the ſeed ſown is the word of God, the rain from heaven denotes the divine aſſiſtance; yet ſtill the produce is repreſented to be in proportion to the natural fertility and goodneſs of the ſoil. The Almighty confers his aſſiſtance, and bears a

part in our ſalvation; but we are not thence to infer, that his aſſiſtance will do all, without our own efforts.

Our nature is indeed weak and frail, too eaſily ſeduced by the temptations we can reſiſt; too prone to evil, though we can diſcern and chuſe the good; too inattentive to the divine ſuggeſtions, but not incapable of complying and co-operating with them. Let us not diſhonour our Maker, by ſuppoſing that he has made us totally corrupt, that he has formed and fitted us only for ſin, and left every ingredient of good out of the human compoſition. Let us not ſuppoſe, that we can add to his glory by degrading his works, by degrading man, the chief of his works within our ſphere of obſervation. It is God indeed that worketh in us both to will and do; yet we are required, and conſequently have power, to work out our ſalvation. Our labours cannot avail without his aſſiſtance; his aſſiſtance will not avail without our labours; on the concurrence of both, our virtue now, and our felicity hereafter, depend.

It may appear, then, in what ſenſe the ſcrip-

ſcripture is to be underſtood, when it attributes our good works both to God and to ourſelves. He illuminates our underſtanding, and, by a ſecret influence, ſuggeſts, and excites us to, what is right; in conſequence of this ability and aſſiſtance, we determine and act. He inſtructs us, and invites our obedience, by the natural light of our own minds, by the expreſs revelation of his will, and by the ſecret whiſpers and ſuggeſtions of his Holy Spirit. But the ſucceſs of all theſe methods will turn upon our complying with, or rejecting them. We may attend, or not, to the admonitions of our own mind; we may obſerve, or neglect, his revealed inſtructions; we may yield to, or oppoſe, the impulſes of the Holy Spirit.

God does not with a reſiſtleſs hand compel us into his ſervice. All his aſſiſtances require our own concurrence to render them effectual. His grace will not illuminate our minds, if we induſtriouſly bar them againſt light and truth. If we have ears to hear, and will not hear, the divine inſtructions are given in vain.

But we ought to conſider, that when God

God invites and offers to conduct us to duty and happineſs, if we are unwilling to comply, if we refuſe his invitation, and reject his aſſiſtance, our caſe is then indeed deſperate, and without remedy: for as it is inconſiſtent with the nature of virtue to ſuppoſe, that we can be made virtuous and good by compulſion; ſo it is inconſiſtent with the nature and perfections of God to ſuppoſe, that without virtue or goodneſs he will approve, or reward us.

If we repay his favour with ingratitude, and continue unprofitable under the means of grace, God, inſtead of compelling us by an over-ruling direction into the paths of obedience and happineſs, may be provoked to reſume his ſlighted gifts, and with-hold the grace which we receive in vain. And nothing more is requiſite to our certain undoing, than to be forſaken of him, and his aſſiſting grace to be withdrawn. Were it our unhappy lot to be thus expoſed, defenceleſs, to the aſſaults of temptation, left to encounter the adverſaries of our happineſs deſtitute of divine armour, cut off from all communication with God, all ſupplies of his

grace

grace intercepted, the frailty and corruption of our nature would ſoon betray, and give us up into the enemy's hands. Unſupported by divine aſſiſtance, we ſhould be loſt to every good diſpoſition, loſt to every virtue. Like branches lopped off, and ſevered from the vine, we ſhould loſe the vital principle that renders us productive of moral fruit; we ſhould be caſt forth, and withered, and fitted for deſtruction.

On the other hand, if we bend our minds to a compliance with the will of our heavenly Father, and are obedient to his direction and guidance, his powerful, though unſeen arm, will conduct us from virtue to virtue, and will never be wanting to us, if we are not wanting to ourſelves. If we open our hearts to his ſacred influences; if our ſouls gaſp unto him as a thirſty land, and drink in the dew of his Spirit, as it ſilently deſcends upon us from heaven;—we ſhall then be neither barren nor unfruitful; the ſeed of divine grace thus ſown upon good ground, upon its natural and proper ſoil, an honeſt and good heart, will take root, and be productive of the

the genuine fruits of the Spirit,—the graces and virtues of a good life.

Grace is the greateſt, beſt of Heaven's bleſſings, and far tranſcends all others we can enjoy. Temporal good things God promiſcuouſly beſtows on the juſt and the unjuſt; often on the evil and unthankful; on thoſe who neither ſolicit nor acknowledge his favours. But his Grace he accounts a pearl of greater price than to be thrown to the negligent and undeſerving. He gives it only to them that aſk it; to them who piouſly implore, and juſtly prize the heavenly gift. Would we then obtain of God a bleſſing, as requiſite to our growth in goodneſs, to the ſuſtenance of our ſpiritual life, as is our daily bread to that of the body? let us not neglect to approach him with importunate and fervent ſupplications for it.

For the attainment of this bleſſing, this ſpiritual food, our prayers cannot be too fervent, cannot be too importunate. And happy ſure is the lot of Chriſtians, to whom God has promiſed the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, on the eaſy terms of aſking, and gratefully receiving it; happy that we are not

not left altogether to the power of irregular paſſions, to the protection of our own weakneſs, and to the counſels of our own corruption; happy that we are under the eye and ſuperintendence of ſo powerful, yet ſo kind a guardian, who never forſakes, till he is forſaken by us; never withdraws his aſſiſtance, till we render it ineffectual; never abandons us in temptations, till our own hearts take part with the tempter, and we betray ourſelves; never refuſes his grace, till we receive it in vain!

Let us not, then, be wanting to ourſelves in ſupplicating and complying with the influences of this divine inſtructor; and *foraſmuch as without thee, O God, we are not able to pleaſe thee, mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, that in keeping thy commandments we may pleaſe thee, both in will and deed, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

SER-

SERMON XIV.

Againſt an improper love of this world.

1 JOHN ii. 15.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

NO enemy exiſts more fatal to virtue and religion, and conſequently to our higheſt and beſt intereſt, than an intemperate paſſion for the world, and its enjoyments. That is the fountain from whence iſſue all the vices and iniquities of mankind. But the deſign of Religion is, to inform us of the worth and dignity of the ſoul, and of the nature of our chief good and happineſs; to moderate our attachment to the world; and, by calling off our thoughts from its falſe and fading pleaſures, to direct and ele-

vate them to where true and permanent joys are to be found. An undue love of the world counteracts and defeats theſe purpoſes, renders us inattentive to, and unworthy of our proper happineſs; and at the ſame time corrupts and vitiates the mind, and diſqualifies and unfits it even for reliſhing and taſting it.

Neceſſary, therefore, it is, that we ſhould be often cautioned againſt an intemperate love of the world; a vice ſo powerful in its temptations, and ſo fatal in its effects. And indeed, if in the very days of our Lord and his apoſtles, when, with regard to the evidence of a future ſtate, men may be almoſt ſaid to have walked by ſight, and not by faith, and by the doctrines which they heard, and the miracles they ſaw, to have had heaven, and the glories of another world, almoſt laid open to view;—if, under theſe advantageous circumſtances, it was neceſſary to be cautioned againſt the allurements and deluſions of the world, much more proper is the admonition, more needful the caution now. But here let it be obſerved, that the love of the world is not in every ſenſe culpable.

culpable. We are not to underſtand the apoſtle, by the words in the text, as forbidding that regard and value for temporal things, which the preſent ſtate and condition of life render neceſſary. For though earthly things cannot conſtitute felicity, are not the materials of true happineſs; yet they are the kind proviſions and preſcriptions which our gracious Creator has given us againſt bodily wants and miſeries, and are to be received and acknowledged with grateful ſentiments of his goodneſs. To conſult our well-being here, is a dictate of the law of nature, as well as to provide for our happineſs hereafter. They who, from the apoſtle's prohibition of loving the world, would infer, that we ſhould hate it, make a very unnatural and wrong concluſion. For were there any thing criminal in diligence and induſtry in acquiring, or in moderation and temperance in enjoying, the good things of the world, our nature would then be ſinful, it would be criminal to be a human being, and we might have juſt reaſon to ſay to our Maker, *Why haſt thou made me thus?*

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In order, therefore, to have a right conception of the meaning and extent of the prohibition in the text, *Love not the world;* we muſt conſider what could be the deſign of our Maker in the formation of the world, and for what end and purpoſe he placed us in it: for hence only can we determine of what real worth and value the world is to us, as this depends ſolely upon the will and pleaſure of our Creator.

God's principle deſign in our creation ſhould ſeem to be, to form us to a capacity of enjoying Himſelf; of being with him, in a manner at preſent above our conception; and perhaps to ſupply and fill up the ſtations of other beings, from which they by tranſgreſſion have fallen. In order to this advancement and promotion, the neceſſary requiſites and qualifications are, ſuch a rectitude of mind and will, ſuch a conformity and likeneſs to the Supreme Being, and ſuch diſpoſitions of virtue and holineſs, as are no other way attainable, but in a ſtate of diſcipline and probation.

For this end and purpoſe our Creator ſeems to have aſſigned the ſtation and condition

tion in which we now find ourſelves; to have clothed us with a body, with inclinations and paſſions; and to have placed us in this world, in order to prepare, and form, and train us up for heaven and himſelf. and that the law in our members might yield ſufficient ſcope and occaſion for the law of the mind to exerciſe and exert itſelf, God has made this world every way fit for a probationary ſtate; fit to anſwer his purpoſe, both in providing a ſupply for lawful and regular deſires, and temptation to ſuch as are unlawful and irregular; that we might by this means prove and exert our fidelity and obedience to him. And in this ſenſe, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is growing ſtill, and we are ſtill tempted with forbidden fruit.

This being conſidered, it is eaſy to apprehend when the love of the world becomes criminal. And this it certainly does, when we conſider it as our ſole or principal good; when it has influence enough to ſeduce us to thoſe vices that diſqualify us for the preſence and enjoyment of the beſt and moſt perfect of beings; when we have recourſe

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to any arts of fraud or violence to obtain its honours, riches, or pleaſures; when we poſſeſs this world's goods, and yet ſee and ſuffer our fellow-creatures to labour under the want of what we penuriouſly accumulate, or profuſely ſquander; or when we are averſe to bid adieu to the world at the command of our Maker; when we yield with reluctance to the laſt ſummons that calls us hence, and are unwilling to reſign our ſoul to him that gave it. When the love of the world betrays us into any of theſe impieties, we not only love it better than we ought to do, but indeed better than we do ourſelves; and the world with all its glories, could we poſſeſs them, would make us but poor amends for what we ſhall loſe by this imprudent attachment to it.

For to have God always before our eyes, as our ſole or principal good; to be kind and compaſſionate to our fellow-creatures; and, with pious reſignation, to ſay to him who beſt knows what is good for us, *Thy will be done*;—theſe are all great and indiſpenſable points of duty, virtues which in this life we are to exerciſe and practiſe, and

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are ſome of thoſe prerequiſites and preparatory qualifications for happineſs, which we are ſent here on purpoſe to acquire; and without which we cannot hope to ſee the face of God in glory. So that this world, far from being the firſt and principal object of our affections, ſhould ever be beheld with a jealous and a cautious eye.

There is danger in indulging even a legitimate love of the world: it is apt to inſinuate and become the favourite paſſion, to withdraw our affection from God, and tempt us to deſert his ſervice. The ſcripture repreſents the world as a region where every path is beſet with ſnares fatal to our future expectations; where we muſt walk with fear and circumſpection, with the conſtant vigilance and apprehenſions of thoſe who travel through an enemy's country. We are often reminded of its ſeducements and dangers; and that life is one continued conflict with temptations.

But it may here be aſked, Is not the ſuppoſition of this world's being deſigned as a tempter to evil, a prompter to immoral and diſhoneſt deſires, is not this an impeachment

ment of the holineſs and goodneſs of the Creator? Do we not hereby, in the final iſſue, make God a tempter to evil, contrary to all our natural apprehenſions of the purity of his moral nature, and to the moſt expreſs declarations of ſcripture, which forbid us, when we are tempted, to ſay, that we are tempted of God?

To which it may be replied, That if the trying and bringing our virtue to the teſt, may be called tempting us to evil, God may in this ſenſe be juſtly ſaid to tempt his creatures; for both reaſon and ſcripture agree, that the preſent life is intended as a ſtate of trial and probation, preparatory to another. But the trial and proof of our virtue is very improperly called a temptation to evil; becauſe, upon the whole, much more powerful are the incitements to virtue than to vice. So that God cannot juſtly be ſaid to tempt us to evil, but to good; in as much as Heaven, with which God has promiſed to reward virtue and goodneſs, is a much more powerful allurement, or temptation, if it may have that name, than any other conſideration can poſſibly be.

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For what reaſons our Creator has thought fit to ſet before us any temptations to evil; why he placed creatures ſo fallible and ſo frail as we in a ſituation expoſed to any the leaſt hazard or danger; is indeed a difficulty in ſpeculation. But the ſtate of the caſe ſhould ſeem to be this. Our Maker's principal deſign in the creation of man, (as was before obſerved), ſeems to be that of forming a creature to be with Himſelf, and to participate in his happineſs. But before man can be admitted to the viſion and enjoyment of God, it is neceſſary that he be holy; and to be holy, he muſt firſt paſs through a ſtate of trial. This makes ſome ſuch ſtate as we are now in, in this world, to become neceſſary; where the motives and inducements to virtue and vice are ſo wiſely balanced, and ſo duly proportioned, that our preference of either may be a matter of mere choice, and the determination of a moſt free agent.

And this ſtate of probation, this ſetting of evil as well as good before us, and putting happineſs or miſery equally in our power, is not a hardſhip peculiar to human

nature; it is probable, that it either now is, or has been, the caſe of every created, intelligent being; that none have been placed in the full poſſeſſion of happineſs at firſt, but have been trained to it by a trial of their obedience; and that there is no creature now in heaven, where the good and virtuous ſhall one day be, but has paſſed through ſome ſuch introductory ſtate of diſcipline and probation as the good and virtuous now do in this world. For moral goodneſs is eſſential to the happineſs of a moral being; and there ſeems to be a like neceſſary relation between a ſtate of probation and moral goodneſs. Take away all trial and temptation to vice, where will be the merit of virtue, or to what reward can it be intitled? Temptations to vice, by furniſhing opportunities for the trial and exerciſe of virtue, add both to our preſent merit, and to our future happineſs; and the more powerful thoſe temptations are, and the ſtronger our reſolution to oppoſe them, the greater is our virtue, and the more glorious will be our reward.

Let us then often and ſeriouſly conſider what

what we are, to what end created, for what purpoſe the Author of our being has ſet good and evil, life and death, before us, and placed us here, as in a pleaſant garden indeed, but planted with forbidden fruit; not ſurely that we ſhould eat and die, but rather that we ſhould refrain and live; not that we ſhould let go our integrity, and ſell our heavenly inheritance, our birthright, for a morſel of power, wealth, or pleaſure; but that it ſhould appear by our behaviour, by a vigilant, uniform, and determined, obedience to our Maker, that our regard to him is infinitely ſuperior to all wordly conſiderations; and that there is nothing upon earth that we deſire in compariſon of him.

The motives of religion, ſays an excellent author *, ought at all times to have ſo much influence as to prevail over the temptations to ſin; and it is not our infirmity, but our iniquity, if they do it not. Our paſſions and appetites, our employment and our company, our youth or our age, the examples of thoſe

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* Dr Clarke.

we converſe with, or the faſhionable and cuſtomary vices of our country;—theſe, and the like, are the temptations which it is the buſineſs of religion, and the proper trial of our virtue, to overcome. And if our paſſions betray, or company ſeduce, or the cuſtoms and faſhion of the world lead us, careleſsly and inconſiderately into the ways of deſtruction, it is not our excuſe, but our condemnation, that we have followed a multitude to do evil; that we have been prevailed upon more by the influence of the world, than by the fear of God; or that our affection to ſin has been ſo ſtrong, that reaſon and religion have not been able to ſubdue it.

Let God, then, be the ſupreme object of our affection; let nothing be regarded in compariſon of the duty we owe to him, nor ſuffered to come in competition with it. Let us wiſely reject what would be moſt agreeable, pleaſant, and beneficial, whenever the acquiſition, if we have it not, or the poſſeſſion, if we have it, is inconſiſtent with duty, and with the regard we owe to the Almighty; that thus we may ſecure our fu-

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ture happineſs, and ſo paſs through things temporal, as finally to loſe not the things eternal.

MAY that all-powerful Being, who alone can order the wills and affections of ſinful men, grant, that we may love what he commands, and deſire what he does promiſe; that ſo, among the ſundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may ſurely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found!

SER-

SERMON XV.

Sin of profaning the name of God.

LEVIT. xix. 12.

Ye ſhall not ſwear by my name falſely, neither ſhalt thou profane the name of thy God.

RELIGION, among other advantages it brought to ſociety, has conſulted its ſecurity and welfare, by furniſhing the firmeſt bond of fidelity, and laying men under the ſtricteſt obligation to reverence an oath, on which the public peace and ſafety ſo much depend, that neither character, nor property, nor life, can be ſecure, where the obligation of an oath is not held ſacred, and the violation of it dreaded. But ſuch is the corruption of mankind, that this baſis of truth

truth and juſtice is too often made to ſupport iniquity and falſehood, and this ſacred tie too often ſported with.

From the words of the text, I ſhall take occaſion to ſhew, 1*ſt*, What is the Nature of an Oath; 2*dly*, What it is to profane the name of God; and, *laſtly*, Shall offer ſome conſiderations on the guilt of habitually profaning his ſacred name in converſation.

I. An oath is an appeal to the Supreme Being, as judge of the truth of what we aſſert; whoſe omniſcience knows the ſecrets of our hearts, knows whether what we declare be correſpondent or not to the conviction of our minds; and whoſe juſtice will accordingly either favour, or be avenged of us: it is the ſubmitting to God, the inviſible judge, and imploring his protection, or imprecating his vengeance, according to the truth or falſehood of what we affirm. Such is the ſolemn Nature of an Oath; and therefore we ſhould always conſider well what we are engaged in, whenever we invoke the Supreme Judge of the world as a witneſs to our aſſertions.

II.

II. Let us, in the next place, obſerve what it is to profane the Name of God. This is done when we uſe it without due conſideration and reverence, or when we uſe it in an unlawful action. The ſacred name of God carries in it the idea of ſuch infinite and inconceivable perfection, of ſuch ſupreme majeſty, power, and authority, that it ought never to be pronounced, but with reſpectful veneration. It ſhould not find admiſſion into our converſation, but when our minds are engaged in pious ſentiments, and our expreſſions are ſerious and devout.

We are directed to ſanctify the Lord our God, i. e. to form ſuch holy conceptions of his great and adorable nature, as may lead us to a ſuitable return of reverential homage. And yet how common is it, on the moſt ſlight and unimportant occaſions, to hear men utter inconſiderately the name of God, when neither the ſubject of their thoughts is ſo weighty, nor the temper of their minds ſo ſerious, as to juſtify the uſe of it. Should we, by a ſeaſonable and well-timed mention of the ſacred name, impreſs on our minds juſt ideas of his ineffable perfections, of the

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I. An oath is an appeal to the Supreme Being, as judge of the truth of what we aſſert; whoſe omniſcience knows the ſecrets of our hearts, knows whether what we declare be correſpondent or not to the conviction of our minds; and whoſe juſtice will accordingly either favour, or be avenged of us: it is the ſubmitting to God, the inviſible judge, and imploring his protection, or imprecating his vengeance, according to the truth or falſehood of what we affirm. Such is the ſolemn Nature of an Oath; and therefore we ſhould always conſider well what we are engaged in, whenever we invoke the Supreme Judge of the world as a witneſs to our aſſertions.

II.

II. Let us, in the next place, obſerve what it is to profane the Name of God. This is done when we uſe it without due conſideration and reverence, or when we uſe it in an unlawful action. The ſacred name of God carries in it the idea of ſuch infinite and inconceivable perfection, of ſuch ſupreme majeſty, power, and authority, that it ought never to be pronounced, but with reſpectful veneration. It ſhould not find admiſſion into our converſation, but when our minds are engaged in pious ſentiments, and our expreſſions are ſerious and devout.

We are directed to ſanctify the Lord our God, i. e. to form ſuch holy conceptions of his great and adorable nature, as may lead us to a ſuitable return of reverential homage. And yet how common is it, on the moſt ſlight and unimportant occaſions, to hear men utter inconſiderately the name of God, when neither the ſubject of their thoughts is ſo weighty, nor the temper of their minds ſo ſerious, as to juſtify the uſe of it. Should we, by a ſeaſonable and well-timed mention of the ſacred name, impreſs on our minds juſt ideas of his ineffable perfections, of the

excellencies of his nature, the wonders of his wiſdom, or the mercies of his providence, and thereby affect our hearts with juſt ſentiments of reſpect and veneration, this were to ſanctify his name. But when we idly apply it to light and trivial ſubjects, we then profane it, we proſtitute it to mean and low purpoſes, unſuitable to the greatneſs, unbecoming the dignity, of the divine nature. It muſt ſurely be offenſive to the Supreme Sovereign of the world, who has himſelf informed us, that he is a jealous God, jealous of his honour, and that he will not ſuffer it to be with-held from him, to obſerve his creatures, with a careleſs indifference, profane his name, and utter it with all the marks of irreverence and diſreſpect.

But, further, the name of God is in a peculiar manner profaned, when we invoke his preſence to an unlawful action, and ſummon him, as it were, to be a ſpectator of our guilt. This is a ſin of a more than common magnitude; it is an open defiance to the power and juſtice of the Almighty, and an inſult on almoſt all the perfections

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of the divine nature. This is a degree of guilt which God will certainly puniſh with a more than common vengeance. For if he who utters the name of God without due reverence, ſhall not be found guiltleſs; he who bids defiance to the all-ſeeing eye and all-powerful arm of the Almighty, by invoking him as a witneſs to his crimes, may doubtleſs expect ſtill ſeverer inflictions of his juſtice.

III. I PROCEED to offer ſome conſiderations on the guilt of habitually profaning the name of God in converſation. No one inſtructed in the firſt rudiments of religion can be ignorant of the flagitious nature of this ſin. With what a ſolemn denunciation of divine wrath is the following precept delivered? *Thou ſhalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs that taketh his name in vain.* The precept is full, plain, and expreſs; the judgement denounced againſt it ſevere and terrible. In the New Teſtament, our Saviour ſays, *Swear not at all.* And by the vehemence expreſſed by St James,

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we may reaſonably judge, that he conſidered this ſin of habitually profaning the name of God, as a ſin of no ſmall weight. *Above all things, my brethren,* ſays he, *ſwear not.* But why *above all things,* if not becauſe it is a ſin in a peculiar manner hateful and offenſive in the ſight of God? It is a wilful, determined tranſgreſſion, incapable of any extenuation from ignorance or infirmity. We cannot pretend ignorance of a precept known and underſtood by all. Nor can we plead the infirmity of our nature; for nature has no propenſity to this ſin. It is a voluntary habit, taken up at pleaſure, and might in a great meaſure be laid down with the ſame eaſe. This renders it the more culpable, ſince it can claim no alleviation either from ignorance or infirmity.

It is recorded as an aggravating circumſtance of the leper's contempt of the prophet Elijah's advice, that he refuſed to purſue it, though directed to ſo eaſy a preſcription as to waſh and be clean: *Had the prophet bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it? how much rather, when he only bids thee waſh and be clean?*

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This is mentioned to ſhew the more than common criminality of any ſinful practice which may with little or no trouble be avoided. Such is the ſin of profaning the name of God; for here there is no natural inclination to contend againſt, no conflict between reaſon and paſſion. The paſſionate man may plead the fire of a warm diſpoſition; the gloomy ſullenneſs of the moroſe may urge the power of an unhappy complexion; but the profaner of the name of God has no ſuch plea. Common reaſon teaches us to reverence the majeſty of the Supreme Being; and no corruption of our nature tempts us to profane that name, which we all know it is our duty to adore.

But, further, beſides the guilt of this practice in itſelf, it unhappily leads to a ſin of a ſtill more enormous magnitude,—to that of Perjury. An habitual cuſtom of profaning the name of God, abates the reſpect and reverence men ought to have for an oath. It is not poſſible they ſhould become proficients in this ſin, did they not, by a gradual progreſs in it, render it eaſy and familiar; and conſequently that awe and reverence

verence which they might once have had for the ſacred name, is, by long repeated cuſtom, gradually and inſenſibly diminiſhed and loſt; and then, it is but natural to ſuppoſe, they grow more indifferent and inattentive to the truth or falſehood of their oath.

This muſt inevitably happen to thoſe who have ſo habituated themſelves to this ſin, that they are often guilty, even without attending to it. And when this practice is become ſo habitual and familiar, that they can hardly finiſh a ſentence without binding it with an oath; if they thus happen to aſſert what is falſe, or promiſe what they mean not to perform, they involve themſelves in the guilt of perjury. And though, doubtleſs, many who, by the practice of mingling oaths with their common diſcourſe, have been raſhly and inadvertently ſurpriſed into the guilt of perjury, would deteſt the commiſſion of that crime upon more deliberate and ſolemn occaſions; yet the frequent inſtances of that crime, upon ſuch ſolemn occaſions, ſeem to originate from the habitual practice of profaning the name of

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God in converſation. For few perſons are capable of advancing at once to a crime ſo enormous. But habit and cuſtom gradually wear out the impreſſions of conſcience; and what the mind would at firſt ſtartle at, practice and long uſage may render familiar, and at length poſſibly agreeable.

This ſhould incline all to contribute their endeavours, by advice, by example, by reproof, or any other method, to ſuppreſs the common practice of profaning the name of God; ſince the pernicious ſin of Perjury, by which the character, property, or life, of any perſon whatever, may be endangered; a ſin which has a tendency to deſtroy all mutual confidence, and to ſubvert all civil ſociety,—is in a great degree owing to it.

I SHALL conclude with ſome ſhort admonitions, in order to prevent the growth or continuance of this ſin.

1*ſt*, He who would avoid the habit or cuſtom, muſt beware of the firſt ſtep or tendency to it. It is a maxim in ſpiritual as well as bodily diſorders, to check the firſt appearance of a diſeaſe, leſt it ſhould grow inve-

inveterate, and at length incurable. And therefore we ſhould do well to avoid all vehemence of aſſertion, all violence of paſſion, as dangerous approaches to this ſin. St Peter, charged with being one of the diſciples of Jeſus, at firſt replied with a bare denial; accuſed a ſecond time, he grew ſomewhat warmer, and expreſſed himſelf with greater vehemence; but when charged the third time, urged his denial with oaths and imprecations.

2*dly*, We may hence obſerve the danger of yielding to the firſt impulſes of paſſion, ſince even an Apoſtle, in a ſhort ſpace of time, was led on from a bare denial to bitter and violent imprecations. When the mind is hurried on by the impetuoſity of violent paſſion, oaths are often found the readieſt way to diſcharge the heat of reſentment; and the mind, not under the conduct of reaſon, vents a ſinful paſſion by a more ſinful execration.

Laſtly, Let us poſſeſs our minds with the moſt reſpectful and awful ſentiments of the greatneſs, and goodneſs, and majeſty, of the Supreme Being. This is the moſt rational and effectual means to prevent us from proſtituting

ſtituting and profaning his ſacred name. Is he the Lord and Ruler of the univerſe, who has heaven for his throne, and earth for his footſtool, whoſe power is irreſiſtible, whoſe kingdom is infinite and eternal, whoſe ſovereignty gives him a right to our obedience, and whoſe goodneſs and mercy to us demand an infinitely higher tribute of grateful reſpect than we can pay? let us not dare to offer ſuch an inſult and indignity, as to call him to witneſs every unimportant matter we may happen to be engaged in. Let us ever preſerve an awful and reverential regard for the majeſty of Heaven; let us not ſpeak or think of God, but with veneration; let the words of our mouth, as well as the meditations of our heart, be ever acceptable in his ſight; let us ever conſult his honour, and *hallowed be his name.*

SERMON XVI.

Duty of doing to others, as we would they ſhould do unto us.

MATTH. vii. 12.

All things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

THE whole Syſtem of Chriſtian duties is clearly a reaſonable ſervice; perfectly conſonant to the natural ſentiments of our minds; well adapted to the conſtitution of human nature, and to the true intereſt and happineſs of mankind; and is marked with evident ſignatures of the wiſdom and benignity of its Author. Among many other excellent laws and precepts contained in it, this in the text, from the high character

racter which our Lord has given it,—from its extenſive utility, and from the foundation it has in equity and reaſon,—ſeems in a peculiar manner to claim attention: *All things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

In conſidering which words, I ſhall obſerve, 1*ſt*, The true import and extent of this precept; 2*dly*, The reaſonableneſs and equity of it; and, *laſtly*, Its utility and excellence.

I. I AM to conſider the true import and extent of this precept; which, excellent as it is, is yet capable of being perverted to purpoſes very different from the deſign and intention of it. A magiſtrate, e. g. is not by this precept obliged, or authoriſed, to ſuffer the guilty to meet with that lenity or impunity, which, in the ſame criminal ſituation, he might probably enough deſire to be extended to himſelf. A perſon in power or authority is not bound by this rule to gratify unreaſonable expectations in his dependents; though, if himſelf were in their cir-

circumſtances, his own deſires might perhaps be unreaſonable, equally as theirs. It was not the intention of the precept to conſtitute our inclinations and deſires the rule of our actions, or the ſtandard of right and wrong; but to inſtruct us, to treat each other, in all circumſtances, according to reaſon and equity; and to obſerve, in all caſes, that behaviour to others, which, on ſimilar occaſions, we could with juſtice and reaſon expect to receive from them.

It does not lay down any new injunction, or preſcribe any duty to which we were not under an antecedent obligation; but it is meant to regulate the practice of all the known ſocial duties; to preſcribe the proportion, and aſcertain the meaſure, of juſtice, mercy, or benevolence, which we ought to mete out to others upon all occaſions; and to make that principle of ſelf-love, which is the general occaſion of injuſtice, fraud, oppreſſion, and iniquity, the moſt effectual means of pointing out and prompting us to acts of honeſty, humanity, and juſtice. For though it is eaſy, from our natural ſentiments of juſtice and equi-

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ty, to diſcern how far actions are right or wrong, when their conſequences are in different to us; yet where ideas of Intereſt interfere, where there is the remoteſt conſideration of ſelf connected with the point before us, it is no eaſy taſk to diſengage the mind from that connection. Our paſſions and inclinations are called in as counſellors; and they have an imperceptible influence even upon the beſt minds; they are ever ready to offer ſome flattering inſinuation, ſome favourable circumſtance, ſome colourable pretext, to juſtify and approve in ourſelves what we would diſapprove and cenſure in another.

A ſlight attention to what paſſes in the world, may obſerve many inſtances of ſelf-partiality, particularly where Intereſt is concerned. Under this influence, we ſee men biaſſed in their judgement, and miſled; we ſee them proof againſt conviction; we ſee them guilty of flagrant injuſtice, evident to others, though not ſeen through that deluſive miſt which ſelf-love ſpreads over the underſtanding. In order, therefore, to guard againſt this ſeductive influence, and

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to enable us to ſee our conduct in a juſt light, we ſhould do well to conſider ourſelves, not as actors, but ſpectators, of our own conduct; we ſhould change the point of view, place our actions at a proper diſtance, and repreſent them as done by others; and from this new ſtation we may form a more impartial and equitable judgement of them.

It is to check that partiality, then, ſo apt always to give its determination in our own favour, that we are directed in the text to make it the rule of our behaviour, to do to others, as we ſhould think it reaſonable they ſhould do to us. This precept puts us into a capacity of judging impartially between ourſelves and others, and, as far as may be, of feeling for them as for ourſelves. It makes us in imagination change conditions with them; and places us in a ſituation where we may have the ſame equal diſcernment of their rights and claims as of our own.——Which leads me,

II. To conſider the equity and reaſonableneſs of this precept.—To do to others what

what we would they ſhould do to us, is ſo clearly juſt and reaſonable, that it requires no elaborate proof or illuſtration. The mind aſſents, as ſoon as it is propoſed; it carries its own evidence along with it; every one's conſcience naturally acquieſces in it; and all ſects, parties, and diſtinctions of men, are unanimous in ſubſcribing to the equity of it.— The reaſonableneſs of this rule, in all caſes of ſocial intercourſe, is apparent. Do we wiſh that others ſhould treat us with benevolence and candour? that they ſhould offer no unprovoked injuries or inſults, nor refuſe the good offices that friendſhip or humanity call for? all this every man thinks perfectly reaſonable in his own caſe, and is equally ſo in the caſe of all.

Should intereſt, humour, or paſſion, then, at any time, as too often they do, prompt us to an injurious or unkind action, ought we not to ſuſpend our compliance, till we have conſulted and aſked our heart, whether we ſhould think it reaſonable to ſuffer that injuſtice or unkindneſs ourſelves, which we are meditating againſt another? And every

every picture of behaviour which in this light appears full of horror and deformity, ſhould be an occaſion of diſſuading us from thoſe actions which would bring the ſame diſagreeable repreſentation to the mind of our neighbour.

Do we deſire that others, in all tranſactions with us ſhould adhere to honeſty, integrity, and truth? If they inſnare us, by fraudulent declarations, ambiguous expreſſions, or fallacious promiſes, do we not think it juſt to exclaim againſt ſuch injurious treatment? and do we not ſuppoſe, that our complaints will be thought well grounded, and that the public voice will concur with our own in condemning it? How unreaſonable, then, would it be, to have recourſe to the ſame inſidious methods which we condemn in others, or to exerciſe thoſe arts of fraud which we ſo much reſent when practiſed upon ourſelves? If, again, we have been ſurpriſed into ſome miſbehaviour, by paſſion, miſtake, or inadvertence, do we not think a kind conſtruction of it reaſonable? and do we not wiſh to be forgiven? We cannot, then, think it equi-

table to refuſe the ſame favourable conſtruction, and the ſame forgiveneſs, to others, in ſimilar circumſtances.

In order, therefore, to act agreeably to Reaſon, and to the ſocial ſtate of our Nature, as well as to the injunctions of the Goſpel, we ſhould make our Saviour's rule the ſubject of frequent meditation; *Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them.* This is an explanation of that other precept, of loving our neighbour as ourſelves; which is nothing elſe but a variation of the expreſſion in the text, being the ſame thing in practice. For this reaſon, it is ſaid to be the law and the prophets; not that this rule is ever mentioned in either; nor is it meant, that it comprehends the whole Syſtem of Religion; but that it is a ſummary and abridgement of all that Moſes in the law, and the ſucceeding prophets, have laid down relative to our duty to our neighbour; and that all the particular precepts and directions they have given with regard to ſocial duties, are compriſed and virtually implied in this one general rule; a rule which all the divine reve-

revelations to mankind, in the law and the prophets, tended ultimately to eſtabliſh.

And in order to enforce the obſervance of this rule among the different ranks and orders of men, the higheſt as well as the loweſt, let it be conſidered, that how wide ſoever the diſtance may appear, which birth, fortune, or ſtation, may have made between one perſon and another; however different and unequal the lots aſſigned us; yet that theſe diſtinctions are merely adventitious and accidental; that the whole race of mankind are of one ſtock, derived from the ſame common original, the workmanſhip of the ſame hands, formed with the ſame immortal ſouls, impreſſed with the ſame divine image, and alike related to God, the equal Father of all; and that as all men are by nature thus equal, they are alike ſubject to every moral obligation, and have all an equal right to the ſame equitable treatment.

Let it be alſo further conſidered, how uncertain and precarious is the poſſeſſion of thoſe diſtinctions which elevate one perſon above another; and how often thoſe who are by Nature equal, are reduced to an equa-

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lity of Condition. What ſecurity have the great and the fortunate, that they ſhall not one day be numbered among the leaſt and loweſt of mankind? Such is the contingency, ſuch the fluctuation, of all human affairs; ſo many ſurpriſing revolutions often happen, and the wheel turns ſometimes ſo quickly round; that it is very poſſible, that to-morrow's ſun may find him eating the bread of affliction, who has hitherto fared ſumptuouſly every day. This uncertainty may furniſh a prudential motive, to conduct ourſelves with that equity and benevolence to our fellow-creatures in one ſtation of life, which we would deſire and expect from them in another.

They therefore to whom Heaven has with a more liberal hand diſtributed the talents of wiſdom, wealth, or power, ſhould be wiſely merciful, and employ their wiſdom in informing the ignorant, their wealth in relieving the indigent, their power in protecting the injured,—leſt themſelves ſhould poſſibly be one day reduced to ſupplicate in vain that aſſiſtance, protection, or relief, which they now refuſe to others. Prudence,

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as well as religion, bids all perſons, by an honeſt and humane behaviour, to make proviſion for good uſage from others, which they may poſſibly ſtand in need of, and which ſuch a behaviour would give them a right to expect.

III. I PROCEED, in the laſt place, to obſerve the utility and excellence of the rule preſcribed in the text. Which may appear, firſt, in its being well adapted to general uſe, and ſuited to all capacities.—It is as eaſy and obvious to common underſtandings, as to the moſt penetrating diſcernment. Its evidence depends not on an accurate deduction of arguments; it is no laboured concluſion drawn from a long chain of intricate reaſoning, to which few have capacity or inclination to attend; but it carries light and conviction along with it, and can hardly be miſapprehended. Moſt other rules of conduct are more complex, have in them ſome obſcurity, and, by being involved in a variety of circumſtances, may require attention and diſcernment, to determine when, and to what degree, they are obligatory; but

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the ſimplicity of this rule renders the application of it intelligible to all. Let us but conſult this oracle, and the way lies plain before us; the rule of righteouſneſs is clear as the light, and the meaſure of juſt dealing as the noon-day.

Another inſtance of the utility of this precept is, that it is applicable to all circumſtances; is a full, adequate, and complete rule of behaviour. Our Saviour was the firſt who taught this comprehenſive aphoriſm, worthy of a divine teacher, which compriſes in it the whole duty of man to man, and is of more avail in the commerce of life, than all the lectures of Heathen moraliſts. It may direct our whole ſocial conduct; ſo that, as no emergency can be ſo ſudden as not to allow time to have recourſe to it, ſo no caſe can happen in which it will not determine. It will inform us what is due on every occaſion, and in all circumſtances, to ſuperiors, equals, or inferiors. It is as applicable to leſſer matters of civility and decency, as to more conſequential, moral duties; and extends to all ranks and denominations of men,—to the rich and the poor, the proſperous and unfortunate, the maſter and

and the ſervant, the monarch and the ſubject. If, in all our intercourſe with others, we invert the caſe, and place ourſelves in our neighbour's ſituation, and conſider him in ours,—our own heart will always be caſuiſt enough to point out and preſcribe a right and proper conduct.

Let us then attend to this important and comprehenſive rule of behaviour, and keep it ever in view, that we may form our whole conduct by it; that we may check the impulſes of unfriendly paſſions, correct the partiality of ſelf-love, and act on all occaſions as reaſon and equity direct. Were but this one precept duly attended to, and adopted into general practice, how would it change the ſcene of human life? what large additions would it make to the public happineſs? It would introduce ſo much peace, and order, and harmony, and virtue, into the world, as would render it the image of heaven, or make it like itſelf at its creation, when every thing was pronounced *good*. We ſhould then ſee no injuſtice, and hear *no complaining in our ſtreets*. Injuries and oppreſſions would not then invade the quiet of

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private life; nor would ambitious power violate the rights of nations, nor deviſe barbarous arts of propagating ruin, and extending deſolation through the world. In every ſtation, men, by acting up to their reſpective obligations, and by maintaining a commerce of mutual good offices, would concur in fixing and eſtabliſhing the general happineſs of mankind upon the moſt ſolid baſis,—that of univerſal virtue.

Let it alſo be remembered, that we muſt all one day appear at the awful tribunal of Heaven, to render an account of our obedience to this law; where the judge of the whole earth will reward every man according to his works, and act by us as we have done to each other. With the upright man, he will ſhew himſelf upright. If we have forgiven others their treſpaſſes, He will forgive ours; if we have had compaſſion on our fellow-ſervants, He will have compaſſion upon us. If, then, we would act as reaſonable beings; if we would attend to what is not only the Subſtance of the law and the prophets, but the Spirit of the goſpel; if we deſire to add to the common happineſs of mankind in this

this world, or to ſecure our own in the next; —we muſt inſcribe this ſhort abſtract of duty upon our hearts, in order to be faithfully copied out into our life and manners,—*Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them.*

SERMON XVII.

Sins of Infirmity and Preſumption.

PSAL. xix. 12. 13.

Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanſe thou me from my ſecret faults. Keep thy ſervant alſo from preſumptuous ſins, leſt they get the dominion over me: ſo ſhall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence.

MAnkind are apt to form various miſapprehenſions concerning the degrees of malignity and guilt in different ſins; and are inclined often to extenuate, ſometimes to aggravate, their failings too much. Some pious perſons, deſirous to walk in all the commandments of God blameleſs, and to approach as near as may be to religious per-

perfection; ſtudious to pleaſe, and afraid to offend their Maker,—are apt to paſs too ſevere a ſentence upon themſelves for the mere ſlips of infirmity; and their fears magnify errors or inadvertencies into tranſgreſſions and crimes. Others there are, (and they by far the moſt numerous), who, though they act, in many inſtances, in plain and direct oppoſition to the laws of religion; yet, with a dangerous partiality or ſelf-deception, perſuade themſelves, that theirs are only the lapſes of natural infirmity, the unavoidable effects of human frailty,—fit objects of compaſſion rather than of juſtice, and intitled to an eaſy and certain forgiveneſs.

So indulgent, generally, are mankind to their own faults, and ſuch the prepoſſeſſion in their own favour,—that there are few ſins ſo black and flagitious, few ſo preſumptuous and of ſo deep a dye, but the offender will, from partial reaſoning, excuſe to himſelf, under the pretext of Infirmity, and conſider them only as ſlight and venial failings. To prevent, therefore, this dangerous ſelf-deception on the one hand, and a groundleſs ſelf-condemnation on the other; that

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we may neither preſume ourſelves to be better, nor apprehend we are worſe than we are; —it may be proper to mark the diſtinction between ſins of Infirmity and ſins of Preſumption; the former not imputable to us as Crimes, the latter not to be forgiven without Repentance.

I ſhall therefore obſerve, 1*ſt*, What failures in our conduct are to be conſidered as ſins of Infirmity; and, 2*dly*, What actions deſerve the ſeverer appellation of *preſumptuous ſins.*

I. LET us obſerve what deviations from the divine laws are to be conſidered as ſins of Infirmity.

Theſe are, firſt, ſuch as proceed from ſome ignorance or error that is involuntary, and, in a moral conſtruction, unavoidable. Where failings are occaſioned by ignorance ſtrictly and abſolutely invincible, i. e. from a natural incapacity, or from an abſolute want of ſufficient means of information, there they can have no degree of criminality in them; where they are the conſe-

conſequences of determined and wilful ignorance, they are highly ſinful.

But where they proceed from ſome error that is, in a moral conſtruction, unavoidable,—that is, ſuch error as, all circumſtances conſidered, we could not reaſonably be expected to eſcape; or ſuch as we are naturally, and almoſt inevitably, led into by the influence of education or example; from the weakneſs of our intellectual faculties, or the want of light neceſſary to aſſiſt us in forming a right judgement; or from prejudices which darken our underſtanding, or from difficulties and obſcurities in things themſelves;—where errors ariſe almoſt neceſſarily from ſuch cauſes, theſe will be admitted, we may hope, as a good plea at the merciful tribunal of Heaven.

Ignorance that is not careleſs, affected, or voluntary, being a misfortune, not a fault, will moſt certainly render us fit objects of divine compaſſion, and not of indignation. This our bleſſed Lord himſelf, upon the croſs, pleaded in extenuation of the worſt of crimes: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* And to this

St

St Paul attributes his own forgiveneſs: *I obtained mercy*, ſays he, *becauſe I did it ignorantly, in unbelief.*

But it is to be obſerved, that in glaring crimes, and plain tranſgreſſions of the divine laws, inevitable ignorance cannot be pleaded; for of our great moral obligations we are ſufficiently informed, both by the light of Nature and of Revelation. The principal laws of God are written with great perſpicuity, both in our hearts and in the goſpel; and the moſt important lines of duty are obvious and legible to every eye. The plea of ignorance can be admitted ſo far only as that ignorance is inevitable, and not the effect of a diſhoneſt diſpoſition, or voluntary neglect.

2*dly*, Thoſe failings or violations of the divine laws are to be reputed ſins of infirmity, unto which we are betrayed by inadvertence or ſurpriſe,—though this ſurpriſe may not be ſtrictly and abſolutely unavoidable, but ſuch as, conſidering the various circumſtances of human life, the frequent inattention of our minds, and the ſudden im-

impreſſion of objects upon them, cannot always be avoided, even by the moſt vigilant and attentive. Of this kind are the leſſer, unpremeditated irregularities of paſſion, inconſiderate expreſſions, inclinations in ſome meaſure criminal, that come uninvited into the mind, and proceed not indeed to action, but yet are received and entertained with too much approbation. Theſe, and other ſimiliar failings, are incident to the wiſeſt and beſt; upon which account the Pſalmiſt ſays, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth?* and the Apoſtle obſerves, that *if we ſay we have no ſin, we deceive ourſelves, and the truth is not in us.*

II. HAVING thus obſerved ſome general marks or characters of what are properly and truly ſins of infirmity, I ſhall next proceed to ſhew what actions deſerve the ſeverer appellation of *preſumptuous ſins.*

1*ſt*, Thoſe are preſumptuous ſins which are committed againſt light and knowledge. The nature of ſin conſiſts in a voluntary departure from the rule of our duty, in ſuffering ourſelves to be ſeduced by ſome intereſt

reſt or paſſion, to act contrary to the law of God, whether communicated by reaſon or revelation. And the nature and eſſence of preſumptuous ſin conſiſts in acting againſt our own convictions, in doing what at the very inſtant of commiſſion we know and acknowledge to be ſinful. It is this conſciouſneſs, this conviction, which renders the action highly criminal, and juſtly puniſhable by a wiſe and righteous governor. And though there may be great diſtinctions, and various extenuations, as well as aggravations, of ſuch offences; yet every action of this kind is in ſome degree a preſumptuous ſin, committed in avowed oppoſition to God, and his Authority.

2*dly*, They alſo may be ſaid to ſin preſumptuouſly, who ſin from wilful inattention and ignorance; who have frequent opportunites of having the doctrines and duties of religion laid before them, and of being informed, or reminded, of its obligations,—but wilfully refuſe their attention, and ſhun opportunities of information. Our Creator has made us intellectual beings, capable of examining and diſtinguiſhing good

and evil, truth and falſehood; and may doubtleſs with juſtice demand from us a conduct ſuitable to thoſe advantages. This duty is ſtill heightened by the revealed aſſiſtances he vouchſafes, and the providential means of improvement he puts in our power. Theſe are talents for which we juſtly ſtand accountable to the all-gracious Donor; and the neglect of them cannot but be wrong in itſelf, and highly offenſive to Him. All voluntary error muſt therefore be criminal; criminal in the ſame degree as it is voluntary; and the guilt or malignity of it is in proportion to the power of avoiding it.

Some perſons may be weak enough to prefer darkneſs to light, when they are determined that their deeds ſhall be evil; may chuſe to avoid information and inſtruction, when they are reſolved to perſiſt in their vices; and may imagine, that their ignorance of duty will extenuate their tranſgreſſion of it. But ſuch ignorance, proceeding, not from an inability to find out their duty, but from a reſolution not to ſeek it; from a corrupt heart, and diſhoneſt diſpoſition,

—has

—has in it all the eſſence and guilt of ſin. We may affirm, that not they only are preſumptuous ſinners, who at the very inſtant of perpetrating wickedneſs, act in conſcious oppoſition to the will of Heaven; but that they alſo are ſuch, who are voluntarily negligent and remiſs in their inquiries after God's will; and chuſe rather to be ignorant than informed of the rules he has laid down,—from a ſuſpicion, that thoſe rules might interrupt or diſturb them in their criminal purſuits, and from a reſolution to avoid and guard againſt ſuch interruption and diſturbance.

3*dly*, As to commit an action againſt our own convictions of its guilt, is the higheſt aggravation of ſin; ſo our conſent to an action, the lawfulneſs of which, after deliberate conſideration, appears ſuſpicious and doubtful, is in a lower degree a preſumptuous ſin alſo; becauſe it is voluntarily and knowingly complying with what we have reaſon to apprehend may be criminal in itſelf, and diſpleaſing to God. Though the merciful Author of our being is not extreme to mark what is done amiſs by his creatures;

creatures; though he makes gracious allowances for defects, and compaſſionates our frailties; yet purity of intention, an honeſt and good heart, is what he ſtrictly requires as the indiſpenſible condition of his favour. And this purity of intention, this goodneſs of heart, will ſhew itſelf in all caſes where the lawfulneſs of an action is doubtful, by adhering to that ſide where our integrity will be moſt ſecure, and by avoiding doubtful and ſuſpected, as much as evident and certain guilt.

Having thus marked the general characters of ſuch actions as deſerve the ſevere appellation of *preſumptuous ſins*, I ſhall only obſerve farther, that of preſumptuous Sinners there are different ranks and degrees, which it may not be improper briefly to mention.

In the loweſt and leaſt culpable degree are they who preſerve in their minds a juſt ſenſe of the obligations of religion, and form the general courſe of their lives by its rules, and have virtue enough to reſiſt frequent ſolicitations to guilt; but yet on ſome occaſions,

occaſions, by the force of particular temptations, ſuffer themſelves to be ſeduced againſt their own convictions. Such perſons are, in thoſe particular inſtances, preſumptuous ſinners; though, upon the whole, they deſerve not the appellation of *wicked*,— as their general behaviour has been right, and conformable to the precepts of virtue. Yet, as they have done what they ought not to have done, and have in ſome inſtances acted contrary to the laws of God, and the acknowledgements of their own hearts,— repentance and amendment are certainly neceſſary in order to obtain forgiveneſs.

In the next and more guilty rank of preſumptuous ſinners, are to be placed thoſe who have ſome ſenſe of duty, and ſome intention of obſerving it; but yet their ſenſe of duty is not vigorous and effectual enough to prevent their compliance with almoſt every temptation that offers to corrupt them. On every trial, whenever their religious integrity is put to the teſt, and on the only occaſions wherein they can evidence their ſincerity, they give proofs only of the feebleneſs of their reſolution, and of their ineffectual

tual ſenſe of religious principles, which, whenever ſeducements invite, they are ready to renounce.

In the higheſt and moſt criminal claſs of ſinners, are thoſe who form deliberate ſchemes of guilt; who premeditate and project plans of wickedneſs; and, without being led into temptation, become their own tempters, and ſearch about for opportunities of iniquity, determined to lay hold on thoſe that offer. To ſuch it will be of little conſequence, with regard to their guilt, whether they find, or not, the opportunities they ſeek. For in the eye of Heaven, and of Juſtice, guilt lies in the intention of guilt. He who determines to commit a crime when occaſion offers, commits it in his heart; and his previous deliberation greatly adds to the malignity of his ſin. Men indeed cannot penetrate the inward intention; human juſtice can take no cogniſance of the heart, and can judge of guilt only by appearances; but the all-ſeeing eye of God diſcerns the inward intention, much better than we can ſee the outward action,—and He judges the heart.

MAY what has been now offered, prevail with us to enter into a ſerious examination of ourſelves, and make a ſtrict inſpection into our lives and manners. Have we been guilty of ſins of infirmity, (as what man is he that liveth and ſinneth not)? let us not neglect to implore pardon and forgiveneſs; and to this end, the repentance we exerciſe in our uſual devotions ſhould ſeem to ſuffice. Sins of Infirmity are what the Pſalmiſt calls ſecret ſins, ſuch as cannot all be particularly noted, nor remembered; and cannot therefore demand a particular, but only a general repentance. But with regard to preſumptuous ſins, ſins deliberately committed, committed againſt the conviction of our own heart and conſcience, which are ever recurring to the mind, and which we cannot, if we would, forget,—the deepeſt contrition of ſoul, and a particular application to the throne of mercy, are doubtleſs abſolutely required.

To avoid, as much as may be, all ſin, whether of Infirmity or Preſumption,—let us, to the moſt vigilant attention to our ways, add our conſtant ſupplications to God for his

his aſſiſting grace; and let each of us addreſs him in the words of the Pſalmiſt,—*Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanſe thou me from my ſecret faults. Keep thy ſervant alſo from preſumptuous ſins, leſt they get the dominion over me; ſo ſhall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence.*

SER-

SERMON XVIII.

On the Reſurrection.

1 COR. vi. 14.

God hath both raiſed up the Lord, and will alſo raiſe up us by his own power.

THE proſpect beyond this life, and the ſtate and condition of man after his deſcent into the grave, and the diſſolution of the body, has been a ſpeculation which has amuſed the ignorant, and perplexed the wiſe, in all ages of the world. Before the revelation of the Goſpel, the future exiſtence of human nature was a diſputable problem; the diſquiſitions of philoſophers terminated only in diffident expectations; and their concluſions were ſuch as their wiſhes, rather than conviction, led them to believe.

Beyond the viſible boundary of death, what may be our doom; whither we ſhall be conveyed; through what ſcenes we are to paſs, or for what duration we may exiſt; whether we ſhall be capable of ſenſation when diveſted of the body; what the ſpecific nature of the enjoyments alloted us; what capacities and powers we may poſſeſs, or what we have to hope or fear,—no human ſagacity or art could ever diſcover. It was all a region of uncertainty, a land of darkneſs, from whence no departed ſpirit had ever returned to bring information. Of the exiſtence of this ſtate the Heathen world were doubtful. One of the poets of antiquity * pathetically complains, that while the luminaries of heaven, the ſun and ſtars, ſet and riſe again; yet man, when he deſcends into the grave, ſinks down into perpetual night, and ſets, never to riſe;—and that, while the vegetable race, the plants and flowers of the field, fade and decay, and obtain a kind of reſurrection in the ſpring; yet the beſt of human beings wither and periſh, without

* Moſchus.

without any proſpect or hope of reſtoration to life.

But the Chriſtian Revelation has diſſipated the uncertainties with regard to a future ſtate; and, by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead, hath given us the ineſtimable aſſurance, that the grave does not put a period to our being; that the ſoul is not to ſleep in perpetual night; that the end of life is but the beginning of immortality, and death no other than a new birth to another ſtate of exiſtence.

As the reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord is the ſureſt foundation of our future hopes, I ſhall obſerve, 1*ſt*, The credibility of that fact; and, 2*dly*, The conſequent certainty of our own reſurrection.

I. Let us obſerve the credibility of the reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord. As his reſurrection was an event in its nature aſtoniſhing, and important in its conſequences, it ſhould ſeem to have been the care of the Supreme Wiſdom to eſtabliſh the credibility of it upon the firmeſt foundation. It is not neceſſary to collect the whole accumulative evi-

evidence of our Lord's reſurrection, nor minutely to detail all the various circumſtances that concur to illuſtrate and confirm the truth of it. It may ſuffice to mention, that our Lord, after he roſe from the dead, appeared to his diſciples with this particular view, that they might teſtify this fact, and be proper and unexceptionable witneſſes of it; that he continued forty days ſhewing himſelf alive after his paſſion, by many infallible proofs; and, after ſeveral private appearances to his apoſtles, was ſeen of above five hundred brethren at once.

The apoſtles, we may obſerve, cannot be charged with credulity in the article of our Lord's reſurrection. When he was betrayed, they all forſook him, and fled; they were offended at the ignominy of his crucifixion; and all their hopes and expectations ſeem to have expired with their Maſter upon the croſs. The firſt accounts of his reſurrection met with little credit among them; and when he appeared to the apoſtles aſſembled together, they were terrified, ſuppoſing him to be a Spirit.

True it is, our Lord ſhewed himſelf not openly

openly to all the people, but to witneſſes choſen before of God; the reaſon of which might be, (if we may be permitted to aſſign the reaſons of the divine conduct), that God does not in any inſtance do all that he has power to do, but ſo much only as to his wiſdom appears right and expedient. He employs ſuch means only as are in their nature fitted to produce conviction, when attended to with an upright and honeſt heart. That the Divine Being may awake all our faculties, and open our underſtanding, ſo as to compell an admiſſion of thoſe truths he is pleaſed to reveal,—and may convert every unbeliever, in the ſame miraculous and irreſiſtible manner as he did St Paul,—is certain and unconteſted: but it is not the uſual method of his providence. He leaves us generally to the application of our intellectual powers, and to that freedom of will which can alone conſtitute the merit of religious faith or practice. The witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection were as numerous as the nature of the fact required, and ſuch as were moſt capable of judging of the identity of his perſon. When they aſſerted his Reſurrection,

rection, they aſſerted a fact in which there was no room for deception. They well knew his perſon, his features, his manner; were admitted to familiar converſe, that they might be ſure they were not deceived by any aereal phantom, or illuſive appearance.

And as it is impoſſible they ſhould be themſelves deceived, it is equally incredible, that they ſhould attempt an impoſition on the world. For that they ſhould, in direct oppoſition to their own native prejudices, and evident intereſts, without any lucrative views in this world, without any proſpect of reward in the next,—perſiſt to death in the atteſtation of what they knew to be a falſehood; and for the ſake of one who had deceived them, form a deliberate, concerted plan to expoſe themſelves to the ſevereſt ſufferings and tortures, to which all men have naturally an inſurmountable averſion,—is a ſuppoſition that cannot be admitted with the leaſt appearance of reaſon. For is it credible, that they could extinguiſh in themſelves all the hopes and fears, the paſſions, affections, and feelings, of human nature? that

that they could diveſt themſelves of the principle of ſelf-preſervation? that they could enter, as it were, into a conſpiracy againſt their own eaſe, intereſt, and reputation? throw off all regard to the happineſs or enjoyment of life; all care even for their own quiet and ſecurity? And for what? to meet poverty and perſecution, reproach and contempt, bonds and impriſonments, ſufferings and death, without any view or intereſt, preſent or future? To this they could have no conceivable temptation or inducement, according to all the principles or motives that are known to influence or operate upon the human mind. On the contrary, on the ſuppoſition of Chriſt's not being riſen, they muſt have been ſenſible, that he was a deceiver; that the promiſes and predictions with which he had amuſed them had failed; and that from him, conſequently, they could have no grounds of hope, either here or hereafter.

In ſhort, that a number of perſons of ſound underſtanding, and honeſt characters, ſhould unanimouſly combine to atteſt and ſupport a falſehood, in oppoſition to all

all their intereſts and prejudices,—to every principle that can be ſuppoſed to influence human actions, and at the hazard of every thing valuable and dear to men,—is abſolutely unaccountable; and would be as aſtoniſhing, and as ſtrictly miraculous, as any interruption or violation of the common courſe of nature.

If we conſider, further, the atteſtation of Heaven to the veracity of the apoſtles, expreſſed in the power conferred on them, of performing miracles, ſpeaking in the language of all nations, and of healing all manner of diſeaſes; a teſtimony ſo circumſtanced muſt be concluded to carry in it all the evidence that any diſtant fact can poſſibly be capable of; and far ſuperior to the proof of any other fact recorded in ancient hiſtory. No ſingle fact in all hiſtory is either ſupported by ſuch unexceptionable witneſſes, or comes to us confirmed with ſuch collateral and ſubſequent evidence. We may be aſſured, therefore, that *God hath raiſed up the Lord, and will therefore raiſe up us alſo by his own power.*——Which leads me,

II.

II. To inquire into the certainty of our own reſurrection. Before life and immortality were brought to light by the Goſpel, human nature could ill ſuſtain the melancholy reflection, that its proſpect might be cloſed, and its exiſtence determine in the grave; and that the evening of life might be ſucceeded by a long, eternal night. The vulgar, therefore, ſupported themſelves with fictions, the wiſe with uncertain hopes and conjectures of the ſoul's immortality. But that the body ſhould return from corruption to a reunion with the ſoul, was not expected by the wiſeſt. The Jews, it is true, might have ſome conception of this, from the tranſlation of Enoch and Elijah to heaven in their bodies; and from Job's declaration of his aſſurance, that in his fleſh he ſhould ſee God. And indeed, as our Creator has thought fit, in our preſent ſtate, to unite the ſoul to a corporeal ſubſtance, this ſhould ſeem to intimate, that the nature of the ſoul is ſuch, that a body ſuited to the ſtate of its future exiſtence, may be requiſite to the due exertion of its powers; and that conſequently there may be a reſurrection of

the body. But the clear diſcovery of this important truth was reſerved for the Author and Finiſher of our faith. We are now aſſured, that *the hour is coming, when all that are in the grave ſhall hear the voice of the Son of man, and ſhall come forth.*

The reſurrection of our Lord is an atteſtation from heaven, that during his reſidence upon earth, he neither acted, promiſed, nor taught, but in conformity to the will of God, with whoſe authority he declared himſelf to be inveſted. And the reaſon of this is clear, becauſe it is utterly irreconcileable with thoſe ideas of the divine attributes, which muſt direct us in all our religious inquiries; and impoſſible, therefore, to conceive, that the God of truth would either decree or permit an evidence of ſo high a nature to be given to any perſon who had aſſumed a falſe character in his name, or had taught, or acted, under that character, in a manner not agreeable to his will.

If, therefore, Chriſt predicted and affirmed, that he would raiſe the dead, and in proof of his aſſertion, ſubdued the powers

of

of death, and aſcended from the grave; there can be no room to doubt, that what he hath acompliſhed in his own perſon, he will alſo fulfil in us. If he verified his prediction to the Jews, *Deſtroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up*; if he reſtored the the temple of his own body, doubtleſs he can alſo rebuild theſe earthly tenements of ours. He who raiſed up Jeſus from the dead can alſo quicken our mortal bodies; and in order to give us an aſſurance, that he will raiſe us up, the reſurrection of Chriſt was made the promiſe and pledge of the reſurrection of the whole human ſpecies.

Nor let it be thought a thing incredible, that God ſhould raiſe the dead. For tho' the materials of our bodies ſhould be diſunited and diſſolved, mingled with duſt, or evaporated into air, diſſipated and diſperſed over the whole face of nature; yet it is infinitely eaſy to Him, to whoſe all comprehenſive mind all objects are at once minutely and diſtinctly preſented, to recall, collect, and arrange, every atom, if needful. Every the ſmalleſt particle of matter, though

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loſt and imperceptible to us, is yet purſued by his all-ſeeing eye, through all its changes, and by his hand guided and conducted in its progreſs in all its various ſtations. He who formed man from duſt, can queſtionleſs reanimate the ſame duſt. He who gave life, can reſtore it; can reorganiſe the ſcattered atoms, if needful, and diſpoſe them in the ſame order as before.

How far, indeed, our bodies ſhall be formed of preciſely the ſame portions of matter they conſiſted of at the time of their diſſolution, or at any other period of their being, is a point that has not been revealed, and cannot be determined. It is a queſtion of no moral import, ſo long as the mind is the ſame, which is all that concerns us. It may ſuffice to all the purpoſes of religion, to be informed, that though *we lie down in diſhonour, we ſhall be raiſed in glory;* and that *our Saviour Chriſt will change theſe bodies, that they may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty power whereby he is able to ſubdue all things to himſelf.*

WHAT has been obſerved may ſuggeſt the following reflections.

1*ſt*, If our bleſſed Lord, by his reſurrection from the dead, has given us ſtronger aſſurances than ever the world had before, of a future exiſtence,—this may reconcile us to death, and diſarm that laſt adverſary of his terrors. It will moderate and compoſe our fears, when we reflect, that though it is appointed unto men to die; though the vital union between ſoul and body muſt one day be diſſolved, and we muſt deſcend into the dark manſions of death;—yet that we are not to be for ever impriſoned in thoſe manſions, not to be extinguiſhed in the grave; that death tranſlates us to a happier ſtate of being; that the ſeparation of the ſoul and body is only for a time; and that too in order to a more perfect union, which ſhall never be diſſolved. All beyond the grave is no longer an unknown region, a land of darkneſs, or a ſtate of oblivion, where all our thoughts periſh. We may now conſider death, not only as a ſecure ſanctuary, a ſafe retreat from all the fears and pains, the labours and ſorrows of life,—

but

but as the gate to immortality, the paſſage to glory, the avenue to heaven. We are now aſſured, that we ſhall go whither our Saviour and Redeemer is gone before us; and that where he is, we ſhall be alſo.

2*dly*, If the awful day is approaching, when *theſe corruptible bodies ſhall put on incorruption, and theſe mortal ſhall put on immortality*; when the grave ſhall reſtore its aſhes, and the ſea give up her dead,—how careful ought we to be, ſo to conduct ourſelves in this life, that we may be able to look beyond it without terror or apprehenſion; that we may be prepared to meet our Redeemer and Judge, and may have hope in that deciſive hour which determines our everlaſting ſtate? I doubt not but all here preſent have hopes, with St Paul, that there will be a reſurrection both of the juſt and the unjuſt; may we all, with him, reſolve to exerciſe ourſelves, therefore, to have always a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man.

Laſtly, Let us reflect what bleſſing and praiſe are due, how much we owe to the mercies of the God and Father of our Lord

Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe kind providence guards and protects us in life, forſakes us not even in death; and has, in the reſurrection of his Son, given us a pledge and aſſurance of a future ſtate of immortal happineſs. O may it be our firſt, our daily, and habitual care, to render ourſelves fit objects of his favour, and not unworthy of ſuch happineſs,—by every expreſſion of pious obedience; by a ſacred attention to every duty, every injunction of the Saviour of mankind, who lived, and died, and roſe again, for us; that in the laſt day, when he ſhall come again in his glorious majeſty to judge the world, we may be favoured with his approbation, and be deemed worthy to enter into life eternal!

SERMON XIX.

On Peace.

ROM. xii. 18.

If it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

WHenever we look abroad into the world, and with a ſerious eye ſurvey and contemplate the ſtate and condition of human nature, we cannot, without the moſt painful impreſſions, reflect, how much human life is embittered, and its numerous afflictions multiplied and aggravated by the cruel addition of the various calamities which mankind inflict on each other;—calamities, not derived from the neceſſary condition of our being; not from any immutable law of nature; not inflicted by Providence,—but vo-

luntarily introduced by our own malignant paſſions, in oppoſition to the monitions and precepts of our Creator.

If mankind would univerſally conform to the original plan of the great Author of their being, and ſteadily purſue thoſe paths of virtue and benevolence which he has pointed out, and in which he has inſtructed them to walk; if they would uniformly act on the principles of religion, and become an holy fraternity, and every man conſider himſelf as brother to every man;— how great an abatement might be made in the ſorrows and miſeries of human life? how happily improved would be the ſtate of mankind? how joyful and pleaſant to aſſociate and dwell together, like brethren, in unity? Meekneſs, moderation, and equity, would then guard the ſecurity of individuals; and juſtice, benevolence, mercy, and other ſocial virtues, would inſure the public tranquillity. All the moſt deſirable advantages of civil life would be ſecured, and the natural effect of univerſal righteouſneſs would be univerſal peace. All the virtues would combine in a happy confederacy to promote the

the peace and tranquillity of human nature, and to make earth reſemble heaven in happineſs as in goodneſs.

The Goſpel is one continued leſſon of all the virtues conducive to this end; and in almoſt every page inſtructs us to be placable and meek, candid and peaceful, benevolent and compaſſionate. But how widely different from the precepts of Chriſtianity are the manners of many who aſſume the Name of Chriſtians? Inſtead of cheriſhing friendly diſpoſitions, and exerting themſelves in kind offices, how common is it to ſee them ſeize every opportunity of fomenting diſcord, of offering or returning injuries, and of making that the Entertainment of the heart, that ought to be moſt diſguſtful to it?

In this diſcourſe I ſhall conſider the duty recommended in the text; and ſhall offer ſome conſiderations to engage your obſervance of it.

I. In order, then, to promote or preſerve the amicable and pacific ſpirit of unity recommended in the text, it ought to be our habitual endeavour, to ſuppreſs or reſtrict all thoſe

thoſe inclinations or paſſions which would inflame our ſenſe of injuries; and cheriſh all ſuch ſentiments and conſiderations, as may recommend mildneſs, moderation, and harmony. We muſt be ſlow to take, and careful not to give offence. We muſt not take diſguſt where no occaſion is given; and where a ſlight one is offered, we muſt make no difficulty to overlook it. We muſt not ſuffer our reſentment to riſe without a cauſe, nor allow it to be violent and intemperate even with one. And though this may lay us under a neceſſity of ſometimes departing from our Right, and of making conceſſions which ſtrict Juſtice might not demand; yet, nevertheleſs, a compliance is required from all who would live up to their duty, and conform to the pacific precepts of our divine Religion.

Calmneſs, indeed, and moderation, in caſes where injuries wound, and wrongs irritate; where nature prompts, and faſhion and cuſtom ſeem in ſome meaſure to demand, and to juſtify reſentment,—are, it muſt be acknowledged, no eaſy taſk. To bleſs the tongue that calumniates, or the hand

hand that ſmites us, is a ſevere reſtraint to our paſſions, a hard injunction to corrupt nature. But it is to be conſidered, that in ſuch caſes we are not to liſten to our paſſions, but to duty; we are not to conſult faſhion, cuſtom, or inclination, but Religion. The precepts of the goſpel equally forbid the offering, or returning of a wrong. *Bleſs them that curſe you*, ſays our bleſſed Lord; *pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you.*

Many other precepts there are, of the ſame import, enjoined by the authority of our Lord, and enforced by his example; which ought therefore to prevail with us, not to liſten to the ſuggeſtions of pride, paſſion, cuſtom, or any principle of falſe honour, which would diſſuade us from the pacific virtues.

Some there are who would charge the violation of the duty in the text ſolely upon the firſt aggreſſors; and think it may be lawful to return, though not to offer an injury. But how vain were it to urge this duty, if ſo eaſy an evaſion were left to malice and revenge? How vain to enjoin peace

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and union, if ſo colourable a pretext were admitted for ſtrife and diſſention? For there are few that will acknowledge, or perhaps can perſuade themſelves, that their anger is unreaſonable, and without a juſt foundation. Even when, in their own opinion, their wrongs have received ſatisfaction; when their paſſions are cooled by reflection, and time has laid their reſentment aſleep;—yet they will be apt, in general, to juſtify it; though they may poſſibly be ingenuous enough to confeſs, that it may have been carried too far. Some plead for a liberty of reſenting and retaliating injuries which have been ſevere and oppreſſive; though they are willing to cenſure and condemn that reſentment which riſes upon trivial occaſions, or imaginary wrongs. But ſince imaginary wrongs often make as deep a wound, and are as painful as real ones, and are conſidered as ſuch; and as every man aſſumes a privilege to judge for himſelf, and to feel the weight of his own wrongs,—every man would be apt to interpret this diſtinction in his own favour.

Beſides, where is the difficulty, or where the

the virtue, of preſerving our temper, or ſuppreſſing our reſentment, where no extraordinary occaſions occur to diſconcert or diſquiet us? The Teſt of our virtue is, when others can be ſo far forgetful of themſelves and their duty, as to offend or injure us without cauſe. If, upon ſuch occaſions, we can forgive offences, and curb revenge, and forbear repaying evil with evil,—ſuch behaviour will ſhew, that we pay a juſt regard to the precepts and authority of Religion.

II. To engage our attention to this duty, it might be ſufficient to obſerve, that it is the beſt preſervative of our own quiet and tranquillity, which can never dwell in the ſame boſom with anger, malice, and reſentment. Theſe are painful paſſions, that diſtort the mind, and force it into the moſt uneaſy poſtures. But to bear no ill-will, to be kindly affectioned, to be in friendſhip and at peace with the world, and with ourſelves,—is the moſt deſirable condition, the pleaſanteſt ſituation, the eaſieſt attitude, of the ſoul. Happy the man, happy in himſelf, and amiable in the eye of the world, who

who thus conducts himself; whose habitual object it is, to contribute to the tranquillity, the satisfaction, the happiness, of all with whom he has connection or intercourse; who regards others with the same eye of tenderness, with which he wishes to be regarded by them; is humble, humane, and peaceful; grants no indulgence to unfriendly passions, but is always disposed to cherish and exert kind affections, and to extend them to his friends, his neighbours, and all Mankind.

On the other hand, he who is employed in meditating and projecting schemes of revenge, can have no quiet, no self-enjoyment, no peace of mind; but must be unhappy, both when he forms his plan of revenge, and carries it into execution, and afterwards reflects upon it. Providence has appointed, that both the devising of mischief, and the reflection upon it afterwards, shall be vexatious and painful; and has wisely ordained, that whoever meditates against the peace of another, shall in the design lose his own. A transient gleam of pleasure may result from accomplishing our vindictive projects; but

but to a reaſonable, conſiderate mind, forbearance, patience, and forgiveneſs, will afford a much more amiable and permanent ſatisfaction. The monuments of our kindneſs are objects that we always with pleaſure view and contemplate; but nothing appears with more terror to our cool reflections, than the retroſpect of a life marked with acts of malice, cruelty, and revenge.

Diſcord and diſſenſion are in ſcripture condemned, ſometimes on account of the unhappy conſequences they produce, at other times on account of the evil principles from which they proceed: *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* ſays the apoſtle; whence all thoſe diſaffections and enmities that divide mankind? *come they not hence, even from your luſts?* from intemperate and ungoverned paſſions? Theſe, upon inquiry, will appear to be the true ſource of diviſions. The avarice of the covetous, e. g. and the inſolence of the proud, can hardly fail to involve them in contentions. Does any one interfere with the intereſt of the former, or offend the vanity of the latter? they are immediately in

arms, and conſider all as their enemies who ſtand in the way of their favourite purſuit. So alſo the reſentful man always finds fuel for reſentment in the behaviour of others; and the malice of the envious makes him averſe to every one whoſe ſituation he ſuppoſes to be happier than his own.

If theſe be the grounds and occaſions of diſſenſions, they may point out the means of preſerving unity and peace. To this end, let not paſſion dictate to us the opinion we form of others: let us be candid and equitable in our judgements: let us make allowances for temper and infirmity, and not impute the miſtakes of inadvertence to malice and deliberate deſign. Impoſſible it often is to penetrate into all the circumſtances which determine the nature of actions. Their outward appearances may lie before us; but their internal ſprings, the hidden purpoſes, the ſecret intentions, and true motives of the heart, we cannot diſcern; and, after all our inquiries, we muſt ſit down with conjectures only. If, then, we can judge only by appearances, which are often fallacious; if the heart of man

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is inſcrutable, except to him that made it, —we ſhould permit candour and charity to plead in behalf of others, and ſuggeſt the moſt favourable conſtruction of their actions. Such a conduct would not only be a proof of our inclination to unity and peace, but would in ſome meaſure obtain its end, as it would prevent us from being too precipitate in condemning others, from yielding to the firſt impulſes of paſſion: it would give time to reaſon and reflection to correct the wrong impreſſions of a haſty ſurmiſe, and thus cut off many occaſions of diſſenſion.

Another common ſource of diſſenſion is Pride, or a too high eſtimation of our rank, merit, or talents; and what naturally accompanies it, too contemptuous ideas of others. This turn of mind renders the proud man too aſſuming; prompts him to require more attention than others think he has a juſt claim to; and expoſes him to what he conſiders as indignities and inſults; which he eſtimates always in proportion to the high value he ſets upon himſelf, and the low opinion he forms of others. Such occaſions

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of diſſention we ſhould prevent, if we could be prevailed on not to think more highly of ourſelves than we ought to think. We view ourſelves with partial eyes, and are very improper judges of our own merits or defects: it is common to magnify the former, and diminiſh the latter. Accurately to diſcern, and impartially to decide upon them, requires a mind more diſengaged from the prejudices and prepoſſeſſions we naturally form in our own favour, than generally falls to the ſhare of mankind. To judge with preciſion of our own merit, is no eaſy taſk; but to preſume upon too high an opinion of it, is evidently a weakneſs. Were we able to correct this one weakneſs, we ſhould become more humble, moderate, and peaceful; we ſhould not be diſconcerted at every neglect of our preſumed merit, nor be at variance with thoſe who differed from us in the eſtimate we had made of ourſelves.

Thus, by judging of ourſelves with humility, and of others with candour, we may obviate many occaſions of diſcord and contention, and may preſerve and promote harmony

mony and peace; a duty to which, both as men and as Chriſtians, we ought to be attentive; for both wiſdom and religion, prudence and duty, concur in their exhortations to us, to live peaceably with all men, and to endeavour, as much as lieth in us, to dwell together, like brethren, in unity.

SER-

SERMON XX.

On Contentment.

1 TIM. vi. 6.

Godlineſs with contentment is great gain.

THough nothing is more certain, than that all earthly enjoyments are defective, and that neither nature nor providence will permit us to paſs through life without a portion of that trouble to which we are born; yet equally certain it is, that we often abridge thoſe enjoyments, and add to that trouble, by habituating ourſelves to contemplate the dark ſide only of our condition, by overlooking or under-rating what is in our power, pointing our view to objects out of our reach, and by an opinion, which obſervation could not fail to refute, that the hap-

happineſs of life conſiſteth in the abundance we poſſeſs.

To prevent the unhappineſs conſequent on this turn of mind, the duty of Contentment recommended in the text is well worthy of our attention, and is of all others the moſt eſſential to our quiet. Other duties are enjoined, that we may be virtuous and good: Contentment is preſcribed to make us happy,—happy as our ſtate will permit; to ſupply the deficiencies that muſt occur; to be a ſubſtitute for enjoyments that will be always wanting. Without this virtue, no condition of life can be happy; and with it, none can be wretched.

In order, then, to form our minds to an acquieſcence in that ſtate, whatever it be, wherein the Supreme Diſpoſer of all things has placed us; let it be obſerved, that as, by the original plan and appointment of the Creator, the talents, ſtations, and powers, of mankind, are infinitely diverſified, hence muſt neceſſarily ariſe various ſubordinations, various gradations of pre-eminence and ſuperiority in ſome, and of dependence and ſubjection in others. And it may hence be inferred,

inferred, that ſuch diverſity appeared to the Supreme Wiſdom to be moſt conducive to the end he had in view,—the general good and well-being of his creatures: for certain it is, that in his government of the world, its well-being is the great object of his adminiſtration. If, then, God, in the arrangement of the various conditions and ſtations of human life, has conſulted the general ſecurity and intereſt of mankind, as a collective body,—it follows, that the condition of particular perſons, as appointed by him, is that which he ſees to be expedient and neceſſary, in ſubordination to the good of the whole,—and ought therefore to be ſubmitted to without complaint.

The condition of every perſon, as allotted by Providence, is certainly what the Supreme Wiſdom ſees to be fit and expedient for him as an individual, as well as adapted to the general ſyſtem. Our Creator has doubtleſs the beſt reaſons for appointing our ſtate to be ſuch as we find it. Be our condition what it may, as far as it is the appointment of Providence, and not the effect of our own faulty conduct, our own iniqui-

ty, indolence, inattention, or imprudence, —it is ſuch as we ſhould deſire, or ſubmit to, if all things proper to be conſidered could be taken into view. He who made and governs us is the Father of his creatures; he conducts all events in the wiſeſt methods, and for the beſt purpoſes, and with ſo particular an attention, that not a ſparrow falls to the ground,—not the moſt inconſiderable contingency can happen,—without the divine permiſſion.

If, then, the world be under the ſuperintendence of a Supreme Governor, who is all-wiſe to diſcern what is fitteſt and beſt for us; and infinitely benevolent and powerful, to determine and execute according to that diſcernment;—we may conclude, that all events that happen to us, and are not the reſult of our own criminal or imprudent conduct, are meant for our advantage, as they are the undoubted appointments of unbounded goodneſs and unerring wiſdom. All his diſpenſations, however ſevere or partial in their preſent appearance, are, we may be aſſured, wiſe, and merciful, and good; and that it is our duty here, and will be our happineſs

happineſs here or hereafter, to acquieſce in his appointments, and pay him the homage of a willing ſubmiſſion.

The world was, by ſome of the ancients, with propriety enough, compared to a theatre, on which mankind appear, and act different parts; but thoſe, not fortuitouſly caſt, but aſſigned by the Director of the univerſe, who beſt knows the characters in which it is proper for us to appear. Our duty is, to acquieſce in what is allotted us; and our ſole concern ought to be, to acquit ourſelves well in our reſpective parts, and ſuſtain well our character whilſt we are upon this ſtage of life. To behave otherwiſe, and be diſſatisfied with our lot, is to reproach the wiſdom that preſides over the theatre of nature; it is to forget that we are but of yeſterday, and know nothing; that God is infinite in knowledge and wiſdom; that the plans of his Providence are far, far too extended and intricate for our limited powers to comprehend; and that, as the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are his thoughts higher than our thoughts, and his ways than our ways.

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Let it be conſidered, that to God we are under numberleſs obligations which we can never diſcharge; that to him we are indebted for our being, and all the bleſſings conſequent upon it, for which we can pay him no equivalent; that he is ever conferring favours and mercies, whilſt we are incapable of making any the ſmalleſt return; that he is good to all, kinder to the worſt than the beſt of us deſerve; that therefore, though his gifts be, for wiſe and good reaſons, diſtributed in unequal portions, yet none ought, none can with juſtice, object to the Donor; ſince, be it more or leſs that is beſtowed, it is all voluntary, unmerited favour.

Every one, therefore, ought to be ſatisfied with his portion; and, inſtead of repining at the more liberal allotments of others, ſhould be grateful for his own. Shall we complain of that Being to whom we owe all that we enjoy, merely becauſe he has not increaſed our ſtore, when, without injuſtice, he might have with-held even what he has given? Does it become us his dependents, who ſubſiſt upon his alms, and poſſeſs nothing

thing but by favour, to preſcribe the ſtation or portion to be allotted us? No man can juſtly ſay to his Maker, Why haſt thou made me thus? Why is my rank ſo mean, my talents ſo few, my ſtation ſo inferior? Why, at this feaſt of nature, to which I am introduced, muſt I ſit down and take a lower place, whilſt many others are bid to go up higher? For ſuch expoſtulations there can be no grounds; ſince, for all that we have, and all we are, we are indebted to the munificence of our Maker; whoſe undoubted prerogative it is, to aſſign to every creature in the univerſe his rank and ſtation.

The almoſt infinite diverſity of ſituations and conditions in which God has arranged mankind, is to be reſolved only into his own ſovereign wiſdom, who may mete out his gratuitous bounty in what various meaſures he thinks fit. To his goodneſs we are indebted for our being, and for the ſtation in being which we hold. But as it is no injury to man, that he was formed a little lower than the angels; no injury to the brute creation, that they are denied the privilege

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of intellectual powers;—ſo neither is injuſtice done to one man, that he is made to differ from another. Abundant reaſon, indeed, we have to pour out our daily gratitude to the Author of our being, for the various bleſſings with which he has favoured us; but no juſt cauſe to be diſcontented for want of what his wiſdom has thought fit to with-hold: *Friend, I do thee no wrong*, may our Creator ſay; *is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, becauſe I am good?*

We may obſerve, that the occaſions of diſcontent are often comparative only. We meaſure our wants, not by our own neceſſities, but by the abundance which our neighbour poſſeſſes; and are unhappy, not ſo much from the lowneſs of our own ſituation, as from the elevation of others. But though the conditions of mankind may be very various and unequal, yet not ſo is their happineſs. The difference may be great in pomp, and ſhew, and opinion; but in true enjoyment they may be nearly equal. Many there are, without any conſiderable advantages of fortune, eaſy and contented; many who

who poſſeſs them all, diſcontented and unhappy. They who gather much of the materials of enjoyment, have nothing over; many who gather little, ſeem to have no lack. There is great reaſon to believe, that the real happineſs, though not the apparent proſperity of life, is diſtributed among the ſons of men with a more equitable hand, and in more equal portions, than negligent obſervers may imagine. For happineſs is ſomething internal; it reſides only in the mind; and if we ſearch for it elſewhere, we ſhall never find it.

Laſtly, If the cauſes of diſcontent ſhould be, not comparative only, or imaginary, but real afflictions; if even food and raiment ſhould be of difficult acquiſition,—we may find ſome conſolation in reflecting, that this vale of life is but ſhort; that beyond it there lie regions of bliſs, where the divine goodneſs will confer abundant rewards upon patience and reſignation, and there amply compenſate the evils we have ſuſtained. Life is a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away, and with it all our ſorrows and complaints for ever. We ought

ought on no occaſion, therefore, to repine at the appointments of Providence: for if we mourn now, we ſhall be comforted hereafter; if we here labour and are heavy laden, there we are ſure to find reſt; if heavineſs ſhould endure for the night of this life, joy cometh in the morning of the next.

Since, then, from what has been obſerved, it may appear, that the Author of our being aſſigns to his creatures ſuch powers, ſuch a ſtation or condition, as his wiſdom ſees to be accommodated to the general ſyſtem, as well as to individuals; ſince God may, without impeachment of his goodneſs or juſtice, diſtribute his gifts in various portions, and we all enjoy more than we can claim or deſerve; ſince, though the allotments of mankind are very different, yet the meaſure of their happineſs may be nearly equal; ſince the occaſions of diſcontent are often comparative only, or imaginary, and when real, can be but of ſhort duration, and will be abundantly recompenſed hereafter;—we have juſt grounds for ſubmiſſion

miſſion and acquieſcence in all the divine diſpenſations.

Has, then, the Giver of all good gifts diſpenſed to any of us his talents with a ſparing hand? has he allotted us a more ſcanty portion, inferior abilities, or a lower ſtation, than others?—inſtead of perpetual, unavailing, and unjuſtifiable diſſatisfaction, let us apply with diligence to the improvement of thoſe talents, and to the duties of that ſtation. It is not ſo conſequential to our happineſs, what our ſtation, what our condition is, as how we conduct ourſelves in it. The favour and approbation of our Lord depend not upon the number of talents which we his ſtewards have received, but upon our application and management of them. Let us, then, leave it to him to appoint the talents we are to manage; let him diſpenſe his bleſſings, who alone knows what will prove a bleſſing to us; let him aſſign the poſt we are to act in: let us be ſolicitous only to approve ourſelves to him in the duties of it. For be our truſt great or ſmall, our fidelity in diſ-

charging it will meet with a ſuitable approbation, in that ſtate where the leaſt will be adorned with a glory greater far than the beſt can deſerve, or the higheſt of us can comprehend.

Let us, then, recommend ourſelves to the favour of God, by a ſubmiſſive acquieſcence in all his diſpenſations. Let us, with grateful complacency, accept what he beſtows, and ſubmit, with pious reſignation, to what he inflicts. And as we are very inſufficient judges of the means of our happineſs,—ignorant of what may hurt or profit us in the final event of things, and know not what to aſk, or what to pray for as we ought;—let us addreſs that all-gracious Being, who is the diſpenſer of every thing that is good in itſelf, the ſole, unerring diſcerner of what is good for us, and beſeech him to give us thoſe things that are good, though we aſk them not; to refuſe every thing that is hurtful, though we ſhould aſk it; and to impreſs on our hearts ſuch an unreluctant ſubmiſſion to his Wiſdom, and ſo unreſerved a confidence in

in his Goodneſs, as may ever incline us to acquieſce, with pious complacency, in his providential appointments, and to believe that to be beſt for us which Heaven is pleaſed to allot.

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SERMON XXI.

Duty of Exemplary Manners.

1 THESS. v. 22.

Abſtain from all appearance of evil.

THough the Chriſtian inſtitution is much more careful to provide for integrity of heart, and purity of intention, than for exterior behaviour, and mere appearances; though we are every where in ſcripture taught, rather to approve ourſelves to God and our own conſcience, than to be anxious how we may ſtand in the opinion of the world;—yet, that principle end once ſecured, a regard to our outward deportment is next required, not only as a matter of decency and prudence, but of indiſpenſable duty.

We

We muſt be exemplary in our manners, and religiouſly abſtain, not only from the commiſſion, but even from the appearances of guilt. We muſt conſider, not only the rectitude of our actions in our own ſight, or in the eye of Heaven, but we muſt reflect alſo in what light they may appear to the world. We muſt not only obſerve ſtrict virtue ourſelves, but endeavour to let that virtue be as influential as may be on the manners of others, and become, what our Saviour called his Apoſtles, the lights of the world; and in our reſpective ſpheres and ſtations, to let the luſtre and beauty of holineſs ſhine forth in our deportment. We ought not to hide our virtue in obſcurity, nor be content with a retired, unobſerved piety, nor confine and immerſe our religion within the cloſet; but we ſhould make it the companion of our converſation, as well as of our retirements,—and by our example endeavour to befriend and ſupport its cauſe, and preſerve its due reputation and eſteem.

Our conduct ſhould not only be juſt, but appear laudable; ſuch as may both obtain the

the divine, and merit human approbation. But be it obſerved, we are not to make the deſire of human approbation the leading motive or principle of our actions: for if human applauſe be indeed our only or ultimate aim, it will alſo be our chief or ſole reward. Our Saviour expreſſed uncommon ſeverity againſt thoſe hypocrites, who, when they gave alms, would ſound a trumpet, to give public notice, and to aſſemble a concourſe of people to be witneſſes of their donations; when they prayed, purpoſely ſelected ſuch places for their acts of devotion as were moſt in view; and when they faſted, took care, by being of a ſad countenance, to acquaint the world with their acts of penitence and auſterity. Theſe duties they performed from motives of vanity and oſtentation, which ought to have proceeded from a ſuperior and better principle of piety. It was this oſtentation only that our Saviour reproved; for he requires us to let our light ſhine before men, and enjoins an exemplary deportment. Some motives to which I ſhall proceed to offer.

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1*ſt*, Every man, from the regard due to his own reputation and character, ought to be exemplary in his behaviour; becauſe, as the world can view only the exterior or ſurface of our actions, without being able to penetrate into their internal principles, and ſecret ſprings,—they can form no other judgement of the intentions of the heart, than what outward appearances ſuggeſt. The mere appearance, therefore, of evil, may be conſtrued into criminality, and give the ſame wound to the character as real guilt. The only queſtion here is, Whether a wiſe and good man, whoſe proper buſineſs it is to approve his conduct to God, and his own conſcience, ought to ſet ſuch a value upon reputation, or the opinion of the world, as to ſuffer a regard for it to influence and determine his actions; eſpecially as reputation has been often repreſented by moraliſts, as a deluſive, precarious, and viſionary good; obtained often without merit, and loſt without cauſe; purchaſed without deſert, and beſtowed without judgement.

But if we conſider, that this deſire of a good name was planted in the mind by the all-

all-wiſe Author of our being, and that a tender concern for it is made neceſſary by the original principles of our nature,—we muſt preſume, that it was not planted there in vain; we muſt conclude, that this undermotive of action ſhould indeed be governed and regulated by a ſuperior principle, but not to be ſuppreſſed or extinguiſhed. The eſteem of the wiſe and good is the moſt laudable and generous of all temporal incitements to a right behaviour; and an inſenſibility to ſuch eſteem will be apt to terminate in an indifference to ſuch actions as deſerve it. *A good name*, ſays Solomon, *is rather to be choſen than great riches.* Both human and divine laws have ever ſet a high price upon it; and all thoſe precepts of religion which forbid calumny, defamation, and ſlander, preſuppoſe them to be evils; and that a good name has a real, and not merely an imaginary value. In many caſes, ſo much reputation is ſo much power; not only reaſons of prudence, therefore, but even duty, will require every man to guard his reputation, as he would preſerve his influence and uſefulneſs in the world.

One caſe, indeed, there is, wherein we are to pay no regard to the opinion or eſteem of the world; and that is, where our adherence to duty and integrity lays us open to detraction and reproach. We are religiouſly to obey the dictates of duty, though the conſequences be cenſure, calumny, or contempt. For duty is too valuable a ſacrifice to be made to popular favour; and unmerited cenſure, a burden much lighter than guilt. For what are the miſtaken reproaches of an ill judging multitude, to the ſevere reproofs of an awakened conſcience? or what the ill-grounded, ſhort-lived diſeſteem of Men, to the juſt and perpetual diſpleaſure of an offended God? Supported by conſcious integrity, a man may well bear up under undeſerved cenſure; but, on the other hand, if he is guilty, and ſelf-convicted, no unmerited applauſe can acquit him to himſelf; and all his popular reputation will, even in his own eye, loſe its luſtre and value.

But though we are not to court the approbation of the world by mean condeſcenſions, or criminal compliances; yet the admonition

monition in the text implies, that we ſhould, by a circumſpect and prudential conduct, let our virtues appear in their true light; and not in the likeneſs, or with the features, of any reſembling vice; that our piety may not be miſtaken for hypocriſy, our charity for oſtentation, humility for meanneſs, and the like.

Such, indeed, it muſt be acknowledged, is the infirmity and iniquity of mankind; their judgements ſo often formed upon imperfect grounds; their opinions ſo often dictated by their paſſions; ſo ready are they to build their own reputation upon the ruins of their neighbours; ſo deſirous to beſtow indirect praiſe upon themſelves, by detecting faults, indiſcretions, or foibles, in others; ſo conſcious of defects, and ſo willing, therefore, to reduce every one to their own level;—that the moſt guarded virtue cannot always avoid being miſapprehended by the inadvertent, or miſrepreſented by the malevolent and envious. But though we cannot always avoid cenſure, we muſt do all we can, as the apoſtle inſtructs us, to cut off all occaſion of cenſure; though it is not

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in our power to insure approbation, it ought to be our endeavour to deserve it.

But, 2*dly*, Not only our own reputation, but the regard also that we ought to have for the glory of God, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures, demands our compliance with the duty in the text. The glory of God is always to be considered as terminating in the happiness of his creatures, and not in any personal acquisition to Himself. To promote his glory, is to promote those just sentiments with regard to him, that reverence for his authority, and that due esteem of his nature and perfections, which may engage mankind to revere and obey his laws, and, by such obedience, to acquire an equitable claim to an heavenly inheritance. His glory, therefore, will be best promoted by an open, apparent, and exemplary obedience to his will.

Our retired acts of piety and virtue are indeed expressive of our personal reverence and submission to the Deity, and as such will be approved and accepted by Him who seeth in secret. But he requires also, that we should honour him before Men; and

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that our behaviour ſhould manifeſt to the world ſuch an awful ſenſe of his being, providence, and perfections, as may incite others to honour him by the ſame virtuous conduct, and may thus render us the happy inſtruments of their future felicity. We ought not to be ſo contracted within ourſelves, as to centre all our care and concern in our own perſonal happineſs. To ſit down ſatisfied with the perſuaſion of having diſcharged our own duty; to acquieſce in our own righteouſneſs, without regarding whether, or how much, virtue or vice, religion or wickedneſs, prevail in the world, —is acting upon a narrow and imperfect principle. Imperfect, indeed, muſt be that virtue that feels no concern for the honour of Religion, and the future felicity of mankind; narrow muſt be that man's heart, which his *own* intereſt, temporal, or eternal, can fill. We ought, by an open and viſible attachment to duty, to expreſs our regard for the honour of God, and our inclination to add to the virtue and to the happineſs of the world.

A good example is a conſtant admonition

to goodneſs. It has a ſecret influence on the manners of thoſe who obſerve it: it carries in it both inſtruction and encouragement; equally directs and exhorts to duty: it admoniſhes and corrects without offence; and has in it all the utility, without the diſguſtfulneſs, of reproof. To ſee others, thoſe particularly whom the world eſteems, going before us in the paths of goodneſs, will naturally invite us to purſue their ſteps, and imitate their virtue. They whoſe eminence and diſtinction ſtamp ſome kind of credit on their actions, and eſtabliſh in ſome degree the faſhion in principles and manners, ought to be particularly attentive to lend their example to the ſupport of religion and virtue. For they are as a city ſet on an hill; the eminence of their ſtation ſets them up to view; their manners are conſpicuous, and will be obſerved, and copied: whereas virtue in the low vale of life, is, by its ſituation, ſcarce viſible, or can appear only in a very limited circle.

It ought alſo to be conſidered, that the vices of others are imputable to us when occa-

occaſioned by our Example. Where our conduct is criminal, its influence on others will be charged to our account, and will render us partakers and accomplices in their crimes. How far the contagion of our manners extends; to what vices, or to what degrees of vice, our example may have ſeduced or encouraged others,—is more, indeed, than we can ſay; but not more than we muſt account for. For though the influence of our vices upon the minds of others may not lie open to human obſervation, yet the Searcher of hearts ſees diſtinctly the degrees of infection communicated by an evil example; and will adjuſt our puniſhment to the meaſure of our guilt.

Be it then our ſtudy, to be exemplary in our manners and deportment; ſince our own reputation, the glory of God, and the happineſs of others, as well as our own, may in ſome meaſure be affected by our behaviour.

Let us not add the weight of our influence to the ſcale of vice; let none have it in their power to plead our example in favour of their guilt; let rather the purity and

ſanctity

ſanctity of our manners be a gentle reproof to the profligate and profane; let our exemplary, and, as far as in us lies, irreproachable conduct, be a ſilent, but continued exhortation to goodneſs; let it be our uniform, unvaried aim, to retrieve the honour of religion, to give reputation to piety, and to excell in every grace and virtue that can adorn the moral, or complete the Chriſtian character; let Religion be not only eſteemed in ſecret, but let us pay it public honour; let us not, like the Jewiſh diſciple, repair to our Lord in private only, and by night; but let our life and manners publiſh and proclaim our attachment and obedience to him.

Let us not only avoid whatever would be criminal in ourſelves, but endeavour, by an exemplary conduct, to reform it in others. For let us remember, that he whoſe good example has made one convert to religion, by extirpating a vice, or planting a virtue, in the mind of another, has ſaved a ſoul alive, and provided for the everlaſting felicity of an immortal being. And they whoſe

whoſe Examples have ſhone forth, and turned many to righteouſneſs, will themſelves be at laſt rewarded with a ſuperior meaſure of glory, and ſhine as the ſtars for ever and ever.

SERMON XXII.

Peace of Mind the attendant on Virtue.

PSAL. xxxvii. 38.

Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for that ſhall bring a man peace at the laſt.

RELigion, though it enjoins univerſal purity,—an uniform obedience to its laws,—and grants no licence to ſin; does not yet require a total exemption from all ſuch failings as ſtrict Juſtice might pronounce faulty;—does not expect in us ſuch perfection as never to ſuffer ourſelves to be ſurpriſed into actions which, upon a review, may appear cenſurable. For if this were the duty, theſe the terms preſcribed by religion, who could comply, or live up to ſuch

ſuch unſinning purity? There is not a juſt man that liveth upon the earth, and ſinneth not. God alone is abſolute, immutable holineſs. He is indeed pure, unclouded light; and in Him is no darkneſs at all; no ſhades or ſpots in his nature. But the brighteſt human virtue is ſhaded with imperfections, and blotted with various defects. Our Supreme Lawgiver, therefore, does not expect abſolute perfection, but accepts us upon the much lower condition of ſincerity, i. e. of a predominant purpoſe and inclination to obey him appearing in the habitual virtues of a good life. This is all the obedience that human frailty can pay, and all that the divine mercy exacts. This it is to keep innocence, and take heed to the thing that is right; and that this will bring peace to the mind, both in this life and in the next, is a doctrine which this diſcourſe is meant to illuſtrate.

Internal peace is the natural conſequence, the genuine produce, of innocence, and an attention to what is right. For ſuch is the moral conſtitution and frame of our nature, that we cannot with-hold our approbation when

when our conduct appears right, and conformable to the laws of our Maker. The mind can never diſapprove a good action, as ſuch; though it may indeed diſapprove the defects in our good actions, and thoſe ſpots and blemiſhes that are too viſible in human characters for conſcience to overlook. Though ſenſible of human frailty, and of the ſtains that are to be found in the pureſt virtue, it never refuſes its congratulations to worthy deeds, to honeſt and benevolent diſpoſitions. Have we performed a good action? have we done juſtly, or ſhewn mercy? we need not ſearch for laboured arguments to juſtify us to ourſelves; for peace and complacency ſpontaneouſly ſpring up from it. Let us but take care to act in compliance with the monitions of conſcience; and it will diffuſe a ſerenity over the mind, which nothing elſe can give, and no external accidents can take away. Then, whatever ſtorms may ariſe from without, even in the ſevereſt ſeaſons of adverſity, we ſhall find a calm within; we ſhall find a ſenſe of ſecurity and confidence in our own breaſt.

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The happineſs, indeed, of men,—of intellectual beings, that have reflection and conſcience,—muſt conſiſt in conducting themſelves ſo, that reflection, and conſcience, thoſe beſt of friends, but moſt implacable of enemies, may not be armed againſt them. It is not power, wealth, reputation, honour,—it is not any thing external,—that can give reſt, and eſtabliſh peace in the Soul. As long as we are reaſonable creatures, Reaſon, whether we will or not, will be chiefly inſtrumental in our ill or well being. Do we act reaſonably and virtuouſly? reaſon or conſcience will be our boſom-friend, and we may be happy. If we act unreaſonably or criminally, conſcience, which can never be reconciled to crimes, will be our internal enemy, and we muſt be wretched.

And indeed nothing can make us ſo abſolutely wretched, or give us ſuch a total diſreliſh of our being, as that ſelf-reproach which is the conſequence of conſcious guilt. This will indeed penetrate the ſoul, and wound the ſpirit, and fill the mind with anguiſh, and the countenance with confuſion. It had this effect upon Cain, after ſhedding his

his brother's blood: *And the Lord ſaid unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?*

When a man's actions are at variance with his judgement, and he lives in contradiction, not only to the laws of God, but to the dictates and acknowledgements of his own breaſt; when he is at once under the dominion of his paſſions, and the reproach of his reaſon; — how is it poſſible he ſhould be ſatisfied with himſelf, or ever know the pleaſure of one ſelf-approving hour? What can be more painful than to be ſelf-accuſed, — to be an involuntary witneſs againſt himſelf, and to be convicted as a criminal by his own ſentence? Far from enjoying the pleaſing gratulations of a good conſcience, or feeling any degree of ſelf-complacency; diſturbed imaginations, bitter reflections, and ſecret remorſe, will prey upon his mind: *There is no peace,* ſaith the prophet, *to the wicked.* Guilt has no reſting place; has not where to lay its head in ſecurity; can find no ſanctuary from its fears, no refuge from its own reproaches. The guilty mind is like a deſolate and barren

ren waſte, over-run with noxious and baneful weeds, exhibiting a deformed and melancholy ſcene, without a ſingle object to invite or entertain the eye. But, on the other hand, the religious and good man, by a conſtant attention to the moral culture and improvement of the ſoul; by planting in it all the virtues, and producing the various fruits of goodneſs; adorns and embelliſhes his mind; ſo that, to the eye of Reflection, it preſents the happieſt and moſt delightful proſpect that art or nature can furniſh. When we are conſcious that we do what we ought, and are what duty requires us to be, as far as human frailty will permit; when we thus find all right at home, in our own breaſt,—we have then the enjoyment of our being, and the mind is in a placid and healthful ſtate. For virtue is indeed to the ſoul, what health is to the body; and all vices are its diſeaſes. When Religion is the principle of our actions, and we regulate our manners and the temper of our ſouls by its preſcriptions, the mind is in health, and eaſe.

But if, rejecting its ſalutary admonitions, we ſuffer

ſuffer ourſelves to be tainted by any vitious infection,—we create to ourſelves conſtant occaſions of pain and anguiſh. And nothing but the variety of objects, amuſements, and pleaſures, which attract attention, and ſupply entertainment, can prevent the anguiſh and pain which the wicked man would feel, were he ſeriouſly to reflect on his conduct. The ſerious reflection upon guilt is painful; and moral evil is attended with diſquieting reflections, juſt as natural evil is with uneaſy ſenſations.

The Author of our nature has appointed painful impreſſions to be made on the mind, or the body, whenever we do what is injurious to the health of the one, or to the virtue of the other. And as evil actions torture the mind with its own reflections; ſo good actions impart agreeable perceptions to the ſoul, and every recollection of them repeats the pleaſure. And what conſideration can more effectually invite and animate us to duty, than to reflect, that the ſenſe and memory of it will always bring pleaſure to the mind? ſo that, with whatever reluctance we enter upon the practice of virtue,

we are ſure of peace and complacency, ſure of no occaſion of inquietude in looking back upon it. For does the conſciouſneſs of having been honeſt, faithful, benevolent, or charitable, ever excite in us any ſorrowful ſentiments of repentance? Did ever the recollection of our virtue fix a painful ſting in the mind? Who ever felt any ſecret remorſe for having done juſtly, loved mercy, or walked humbly with his God?

Perform your duty faithfully to your Creator and your fellow-creatures, and the memory of it will be always pleaſing;—will ſupply an entertainment that never ſatiates. Is there trouble in any good action we do? the trouble is ſoon over, but the pleaſure of it is a perpetual feaſt. Do we find pleaſure in a criminal action? it is tranſient and ſhort-lived; but the anguiſh which ſucceeds is a worm that never dies. It is an inconteſted truth, that the practice of virtue is the practice recommended and approved by our Reaſon,—by that principle which was given us by our Creator to ſuperintend and regulate our conduct. To Virtue we are conſtantly directed by ſerious conſideration; are

are attended in it with the ſecret approbation of our own mind; and after it, entertained with the pleaſures of reflection. On the contrary, to Vice we are never prompted by ſerious conſideration; never, never led by the counſels of reaſon and judgement; but are accompanied in it by frequent accuſations of our own heart, and purſued after it by the reproaches of a wounded conſcience.

True it is, in the preſent ſtate of our being, the joy of a ſelf-gratulating, and the torture of a ſelf-reproaching mind, are in a great meaſure diverted and abated by various cauſes; by the numerous cares, avocations, employments, and amuſements of life. But when life comes to a concluſion, and thoſe avocations and amuſements are no more; when Death cloſes the ſcene, and diſſolves the union of body and mind,—the mind will probably be more alive to every impreſſion, and its ſenſibility become much more exquiſite and perfect, when it is no longer clogged and incumbered with the body; and the joys and ſorrows of conſcience may be felt in a much higher degree than we

we are now able to conceive. But even now experience convinces ſome, a careful attention might convince all,—that the one is the higheſt happineſs, the other the ſevereſt miſery, of our nature; that no affliction can be ſo ill ſupported as the anguiſh of a guilty mind, no pleaſure equal to that of innocence, and a good conſcience.

But further; the internal peace which the good man enjoys, receives a great addition from this conſideration, that his innocence muſt bring him peace at the laſt; that his integrity cannot fail to procure him what nothing elſe can procure, the approbation and favour of that Supreme Being who loveth righteouſneſs, and whoſe countenance will behold the upright. The oppoſition is not greater between light and darkneſs, than between virtue and vice. The one is in its nature right, good, and amiable; the other of eſſential malignity, the object of deteſtation. Reſentment and indignation are the juſt wages of iniquity; approbation and favour are naturally due to virtue.

And certain it is, that the infinitely righteous Governor of the world, the Judge of all

all the earth, will do right, and act in conformity to thoſe diſtinctions that have an immoveable foundation in nature. Certain it is, that he will expreſs his approbation of the one by proper rewards, and his diſpleaſure at the other by juſt puniſhments. For what is this but acting according to reaſon and rectitude? and what may, conſequently, be expected from Him who is infinite reaſon, whoſe countenance cannot behold iniquity without indignation, nor the upright without favour? It is his irreverſible decree, a decree as immutable as the nature of good and evil, as immutable as his own nature and perfections,—that ſinners ſhall receive the juſt wages of ſin, and good men the reward of their labours, if not in this life, moſt certainly in another.

The ſcene of retribution, indeed, is not laid in this world; though even here virtue does not always languiſh unobſerved and neglected. An inviſible Providence often attends the ſteps of the righteous, and conducts them in the paths of proſperity and ſucceſs. But though the practice of virtue

is

is often profitable, always ſatisfactory, in this life; though it brings along with it various preſent bleſſings and rewards;—yet it inſures to us infinitely more and greater in reverſion. Virtue can look forward to futurity with confidence, and has the higheſt pleaſure in hoping and believing, that as certainly as there is an infinitely good Being, who governs the world; as certainly as he formed us capable of diſcerning the diſtinctions of good and evil; as certainly as he made us intellectual and accountable beings; and as certainly as there is a future ſtate to ſucceed this ſhort, tranſitory ſcene;—ſo certainly will the favour of God, and all the proper expreſſions of it, be hereafter the reward of the virtuous and the good. And from the firm hope and expectation of this future reward, this happineſs in reverſion, it is, that religious minds derive their principal enjoyment. This is their hope, their refuge, their conſolation, and ſupport, that heightens and improves every pleaſure, and ſoftens and alleviates every misfortune.

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If religion opened to our view no proſpect of immortality, made no proviſion for us hereafter, and took no care of us beyond the grave; though its duties would be ſtill in their nature right, and good, and amiable, preferable far to vice and guilt; yet it would undoubtedly come leſs recommended, and have an inferior claim to our regard. But ſince we are aſſured of another life to ſucceed the preſent, and of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory in it, promiſed to our obedience,—what does reaſon tell us ought to be the firſt object of our care? What is the one thing needful, but to ſecure, by our obedience, a claim to this heavenly inheritance? Virtue comes not only attended with tranquillity of mind, which is the principal ſatisfaction of life; with the favour of God, which is better than life;—but alſo inſures to us eternal life and felicity hereafter. It brings with it comfortable reflections, and ſets before us the moſt agreeable proſpects. It is pleaſing in the act, delightful in recollection, happy in its expectations. Keep innocency,

nocency, then, and take head to the thing that is right; for that, and that alone, can bring us peace, both now and at the laſt.

SER-

SERMON XXIII.

Methods by which God has revealed his Will to Mankind.

1 TIM. ii. 4.

——*Who will have all men to be ſaved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

IF we have upon our mind a ſerious conviction of the exiſtence of a God, the Author and Governor of univerſal nature; and if we believe, that, this life ended, we ſhall enter into a more important ſtate of being, wherein divine juſtice will allot rewards, or inflictions, ſuited to our behaviour here on earth;—we cannot but find ourſelves infinitely concerned to obtain the approbation of the Supreme Arbiter of our fate; and, conſequently, to apply our whole

care and attention to diſcover what is his will, what conduct will recommend to his favour, and what will render us objects of his diſpleaſure.

And in this reſpect we are not left to wander in darkneſs and uncertainty. As God has a ſovereign claim to the obedience of his creatures, ſo has he ſufficiently inſtructed us in the nature of the obedience he expects; for, as the apoſtle expreſſes it in the text, he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Let us therefore inquire, by what methods God has communicated to mankind the knowledge of his will, and of the duties he requires from them.

The Almighty does not indeed appear in a viſible form and majeſty to his creatures, to announce to them their various duties; nor does he communicate his inſtructions by an audible and awful voice from heaven; but the ſame information, the ſame inſtructions, are delivered in a way and manner that do not interfere with moral liberty. He ſpeaks to us in the language of nature; he reveals his

his will in the ſtill voice of reaſon; in the dictates of conſcience, by which we are taught good and evil, and have as evident a perception of the diſtinction between virtue and vice, between duty and tranſgreſſion, as the eye has of the beauty or deformmity of objects of ſight, or of the difference between light and darkneſs. When we are by nature taught the difference of good and evil, and our various moral duties,—who is it but the Author of nature that teaches and inſtructs us? If he has ſo framed the mind, that ſome actions, by his appointment, neceſſarily appear to us right, and amiable, and worthy of reward; others wrong, and hateful, and deſerving of puniſhment;—this is equivalent to a declaration of him who made us, that we ought to purſue the one, and avoid the other; that he approves, and will reward the former; and diſapproves, and will puniſh the latter. If we are by nature uniformly led to annex the ideas of propriety, fitneſs, and rectitude, to certain actions,—it is a clear intimation from the Author of our being, that ſuch actions have his approbation.

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The Divine Goodneſs has thus made his laws ſufficiently clear to all who are bound to obey them: and the promulgation of his laws, we may obſerve, is the completeſt that can be wiſhed or imagined; for it is not made, like that of human laws, once perhaps in a ſolemn manner, at ſome public place, on ſome particular occaſion; but it is made and repeated, conſtantly and perpetually, by the voice of Nature, which every one muſt hear; and inſcribed on every man's heart, in Characters which he cannot but underſtand. Of this law we may juſtly indeed ſay, that *it is not hidden from us, neither is it far off; it is not in heaven, that we ſhould ſay, Who ſhall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us? but it is very nigh unto us, in our mouth, and in our heart, that we may do it.*

The moral principle in us, whether we call it conſcience, reaſon, or moral ſenſe; whether we conſider it as a perception of the underſtanding, or a ſentiment of the heart, or, what ſeems neareſt the truth, as including both;—this moral faculty points out, in moſt caſes, the rightneſs or iniquity

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of actions, in ſo conſpicuous and clear a light, that the moſt ignorant perceive it, without any previous application or inſtruction; and generally apprehend what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, in common behaviour, as clearly and diſtinctly as they perceive the difference between truth and falſehood in the moſt obvious propoſitions. Nature, that gave us corporeal organs to diſtinguiſh light and darkneſs, gave us alſo an intellectual eye, a moral power, to diſcern, with equal readineſs and facility, right and wrong, good and evil.

This directing principle in us could be given with no other intention, than to ſerve as a lantern unto our feet, and a light unto our paths; to ſhew us what courſe of action we ought to purſue, and what errors we ſhould avoid. And as the law in our hearts was inſcribed there by the hand of our Creator; ſo, in order to make it ſtill more evidently appear, that he expects and requires our obedience to this law,—he has enforced it by natural ſanctions, by internal rewards or puniſhments which are naturally conſequent on the obſervance or violation

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of it. For he has ſo framed and conſtituted the human mind, that whenever we reflect upon our moral behaviour, ſuch reflection is neceſſarily accompanied with a pleaſing or painful conſciouſneſs. He has annexed an inſeparable ſenſe of ſecurity and good deſert to good actions, and of ill deſert and danger to bad ones. An odious perception of guilt, ſelf-reproach, and ſecret apprehenſions of the divine diſpleaſure, are the internal conſequences of ſin; and ſerenity, gladneſs of heart, ſelf-enjoyment, and a confidence in the divine favour, are the ſure attendants on virtue; and are thus the natural ſanctions of the Law of our nature;—clear indications of the divine approbation of virtue, and diſapprobation of vice; and amount to a declaration, that it is the will of the Author of our Being, that we ſhould purſue the former, and avoid the latter. The book of nature, then,—that book which lies open to all the world, is publiſhed in all nations, written in all languages, intelligible to all people; that is our firſt revelation; and in the volume of that book we may plainly read the will of God.

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But, 2*dly*, Though this book of nature, this volume of the law of reaſon, in many nations, and for many ages, ſupplied the place of other laws; yet God did not leave all mankind to the ſuggeſtions of nature or reaſon alone, but, from the beginning, communicated occaſional revelations to ſome ſelect perſons in the firſt ages of the world, when reaſon may be ſuppoſed to have been leſs cultivated and improved, and, conſequently, to have ſtood in greater need of revealed inſtructions. He gave afterwards a law to the people of Iſrael, and out of heaven made them to hear his voice, that he might inſtruct them. This law was not indeed, like the law of reaſon, univerſal and obligatory to all mankind; but was in its nature and deſign a municipal law and conſtitution, for the governing of one particular nation and people, who were, by civil and religious inſtitutions, ſeparated from all people upon the face of the earth, and in a great meaſure excluded from the commerce and converſation of other nations. Part of their law was adapted to their genius and prejudices, and particularly to their inclination

tion for a pompous, exterior worſhip. God afterwards ſent a ſucceſſion of inſpired prophets, to reprove and correct the degeneracy of his people, to preſerve the purity of religion, and eſpecially to teach and inculcate the ſuperior excellence and importance of moral virtue, then ſupplanted by external obſervances.

The intention of our all-gracious Creator in this revealing himſelf at ſundry times to his creatures, was, doubtleſs, that they might know and obey him, and be made happy by ſuch knowledge and obedience. And ſtill further to effectuate this merciful intention, he ſent the Saviour of the world, with the laſt, the moſt authoritative and perfect revelation of his will; not to one nation or people only, like the Moſaic law,—but to all people, nations, and languages. God had indeed given his ſtatutes and ordinances unto Iſrael; but he had not dealt ſo with any other nation, nor had the Heathen knowledge of his revealed will. But our Saviour Chriſt came, not only to fulfil the Jewiſh law, but alſo to be a light to lighten the Gentiles.

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The law of nature, which was originally, indeed, inſcribed upon the heart of man, but was become much corrupted and defaced, and almoſt obliterated, by error and ſuperſtition, our bleſſed Saviour, by his advent into the world, republiſhed, reſtored in its genuine purity, confirmed with new authority, illuſtrated with new light, and enforced with new ſanctions. He taught the pureſt morality in all its juſt extent; gave us a complete and perfect law and rule of life; fixed our duty, and made it more plain and certain, than either the law of nature, or the Jewiſh inſtitution, had done before. His whole ſyſtem was committed to writing, in a language at that time the moſt univerſally underſtood of any in the world; by which means this ſacred treaſure of wiſdom has been tranſmitted to us,—and mankind are thereby continually informed, reminded, and exhorted to the practice of their duty.

From what has been offered we may obſerve, firſt, the extenſive goodneſs and affection of the Supreme Being to us his creatures, in the various proviſions he has made to lead us to the knowledge and practice of

duty, and to the enjoyment of that felicity which reſults from it. Every part, indeed, of the divine conduct towards mankind, bears the moſt evident ſignatures of his attention to their happineſs. Theſe are viſible in the whole conſtitution of Nature, and in all the diſpenſations of Providence, even thoſe which regard only our temporal convenience, and exterior condition; but the moſt valuable expreſſions of his goodneſs are thoſe which relate to the future, eternal intereſts of our Souls. Such is that moral faculty which he has formed within us,—that candle of the Lord which he hath lighted up in every human mind, to ſhew us the paths of virtue and happineſs; and ſuch alſo is that additional greater light afforded by Revelation.

Theſe are clear indications of his paternal regard and affection to men, his creatures and children; and muſt wipe off that injurious imputation which ſome would fix upon him, who think, that he predeſtinated a great part of mankind to inevitable miſery; and therefore excluded them from all light of information, and ſhut them up in a ſtate of

of unavoidable darkneſs and ignorance. Highly injurious is this opinion to the honour of Him, whoſe mercies are over all his works, who would have all men to be ſaved, and whoſe eſpecial care it doubtleſs is, to conduct the moral and intellectual part of his creation to that ſtate of perfection and felicity for which he deſigned and framed them. He is the Saviour of all men, even of thoſe to whom he has not communicated his inſpired inſtructions; as he has lighted up ſo much knowledge in their minds, and given them ſo many natural notices of their duty, as, if properly attended to, would lead them to the end of religion; and did in fact enable ſome of the Heathen world to make a conſiderable progreſs in moral goodneſs, which God will undoubtedly acknowledge with ſuitable diſtinctions of glory.

Laſtly, If God has aſſiſted Chriſtians particularly with ſuch various means of religious inſtruction, and has revealed to us the knowledge of his will, both by the light of nature and of the goſpel; it highly concerns us ſeriouſly to reflect upon our obligations to conform to his will, and to live up to that

knowledge of it which he has vouchſafed to communicate to us.

God has entirely deprived our ſins of the plea of ignorance; for, under the light of Revelation, added to that of Nature, ignorance cannot but be voluntary, and muſt itſelf be a crime which can admit of no extenuation. Let us conſider, that all the advantages and opportunities of inſtruction we enjoy, are talents intruſted to our care, for the uſe and application of which we ſtand accountable; that Chriſtians ought to go beyond the reſt of the world in piety and virtue, in proportion to thoſe advantages; that every degree of knowledge we poſſeſs will be an aggravation of the ſins committed againſt it, and will add to the meaſure of our puniſhment, and to the number of our ſtripes; that if the Heathen world, who had no other knowledge of the divine will than what they could collect from the viſible works of the Creator, and from the light of unaſſiſted Reaſon, were left without excuſe for not obeying the direction of that light; and if he alſo who deſpiſed the law of Moſes, died without mercy,—how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect

neglect ſo much greater means of ſalvation? For unto whomſoever much is given, of him much will be required. Better it had been for us, not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us. What can excuſe or extenuate the guilt of the Chriſtian offender, who ſins againſt light and conviction, with a clear view of the rule of his duty, and with a deliberate contempt, and determined neglect of it? What evaſions can he find to acquit him to the world, to himſelf, or, what is of infinitely higher concern, to the Supreme Judge of all the earth?

Let us, then, be careful to profit by the advantages we enjoy, and not pervert the mercies of the goſpel into an occaſion of adding to our condemnation; let not the very means of ſalvation become the ſaddeſt aggravation of our ruin; let us henceforth walk as children of light; and let thoſe beams of divine knowledge which illuminate our minds, convey their ſalutary influence into our hearts, and appear conſpicuous in all the virtues of a good life. Happy are we

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that know theſe things; much happier ſtill, if we are careful to do them. Then may we look forward with humble confidence to the laſt awful tribunal, in expectation of the mercy of our Judge,—and piouſly hope, that he who has in this world granted us the knowledge of his truth, will in the world to come give us life everlaſting.

SER-

SERMON XXIV.

General inſtances of God's goodneſs to Men.

PSAL. cvii. 31.

O that men would therefore praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men!

RELIGION, both natural and revealed, is founded upon this principle, That God, the creator of all things, is a Being infinitely good and benevolent. On this principle, as on a firm foundation, reſt all our better hopes. And as this is of all truths the moſt important, ſo to this the whole creation bears ample teſtimony. For as the Deity is ſupreme, independent, ſelf-ſufficient, incapable of having any private end

end to ſerve,—it is wholly inconceivable, what, beſides his goodneſs, or diſpoſition to communicate happineſs, could at firſt induce him to confer exiſtence on his creatures, or what afterwards can engage him to the exertion of his power in preſerving and governing them. The happineſs of his creatures was queſtionleſs the object he had in view when he gave birth to the creation. It was for this the world was produced, and for this it is continued and governed. This is the end, the ſole end conceivable by us, of creation and providence.

As the goodneſs of the Deity muſt ever be a pleaſing object of contemplation, and nothing can be a better ground of conſolation and joy to his creatures,—I ſhall in this diſcourſe ſelect and point out ſome evident and general Inſtances of his goodneſs; ſome of the wonders that he doth for the children of men.

I. The goodneſs of the Supreme Being is apparent in the regular and liberal proviſion he makes for the ſuſtenance and ſupport of the numerous tribes of his creatures, and

and in the annual diſtributions of his bounty to them. What almoſt infinite multitudes of various beings are his dependents, and ſubſiſt by the alms of his mercy! How extenſive and aſtoniſhing is that providence which in one view comprehends the whole world, and the ſupport of every creature in it, and produces ſtores adequate to ſuch an immenſe and continual conſumption! *The eyes of all wait upon God; he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteouſneſs.*

The human ſpecies ſeem to be indeed eſpecial objects of his providential care. He is kind to us above our deſerts, and beyond our hopes. All our various, ſtill returning wants, are ſupplied by his bounteous hand. Which way ſoever we turn our eyes, we find ourſelves encompaſſed with the mercies of God, and they ſurround us on every ſide. How amazing is his attention to the children of men, in giving us *rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs!* For us *he viſiteth the earth, and bleſſeth it. He watereth her furrows, ſendeth rain into the little vallies*

thereof, bleſſeth the increaſe of it, and crowneth the year with his goodneſs.

When our bleſſed Saviour, with a few loaves, compaſſionately fed a numerous multitude; aſtoniſhed at the miracle, they juſtly ſuppoſed him to be ſome great perſonage inveſted with power from Heaven. But how much more aſtoniſhing is that kind exertion of divine goodneſs, which, by an annual miracle, if we may ſo call it, multiplies the fruits of the ground, and gives food to all the nations of the earth,—who ſubſiſt upon the regular returns of this bounty, and are fed with bread from heaven? It is only the regularity of this appearance, and its periodical return at ſtated ſeaſons, that makes it ceaſe to be miraculous; but it is in its nature as wonderful and aſtoniſhing, as that a few loaves, ſhould, in our Saviour's hand, grow, and be multiplied to the ſuſtenance of a great multitude. We are apt, indeed, to look upon the produce of the earth as our own, and to conſider it as the debt of Nature, rather than the bounty of Providence; whereas we

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ought to regard it as the alms of our Creator, which he diſtributes to us his creatures, who depend on the regular ſupplies, the annual donations, of his charity, for our food and ſubſiſtence.

II. But our merciful God not only liberally provides for our ſuſtenance, and ſupplies our wants, but his kind providence alſo protects and watches over us with a paternal affection; regards us, though we forget him; is mindful of us, when we are neglectful of ourſelves; renews his mercy to us every morning; is patient, though we provoke him every day. No moment of our lives is deſtitute of his care; no accident can find us unguarded by his watchful eye. His powerful, though unſeen arm, defends us, as with a ſhield, from many known, many unknown evils. Seldom a day paſſes, at the cloſe of which we have not reaſon to thank God for it. From the moment of our birth to the preſent hour, he has ſupported and bleſſed us with a thouſand mercies. When we conſider our preſervation amidſt all the hazards and dangers, the in-

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ward diſeaſes, the outward violences, our frail nature is liable to; when we reflect upon all the various evils we have eſcaped, the ſucceſſes we have obtained, and the bleſſings we have enjoyed;—muſt we not feel a grateful ſenſe of the divine favour and protection? Many favourable paſſages of his providence, many inſtances of his more immediate hand, relieving our wants, aiding our infirmities, ſupporting us under troubles, extricating us from difficulties, or protecting us from dangers, we muſt indeed be inattentive, if we have not obſerved, and ungrateful, if we forget.

And what can we give unto the Lord, or what does he require, for all the benefits that he hath done unto us? No difficult, oppreſſive, or ſevere ſervices; nothing but the obſervance of ſuch duties as their natural excellence, amiableneſs, and utility, muſt, antecedently to any divine injunction, have recommended to our attention and eſteem. ——Which leads,

III. To another inſtance of the divine goodneſs, viz. his adapting his laws to our nature,

nature, and requiring only thoſe ſervices which are the proper inſtruments and means of our happineſs, are ſubſervient and eſſential to the ſecurity and well-being of individuals, and to the public intereſt and tranquillity of the world: A conduct this, worthy of the Father of mankind, and clearly expreſſive of his paternal affection to us. God has an abſolute, unlimited dominion over his creatures; and if he had bid us do ſome great thing, we muſt have done it. He might, if he had ſo pleaſed, have impoſed heavy burdens; might have required, under the ſevereſt penalties, the obſervance of injunctions to which our nature was moſt averſe, and where we muſt have obeyed with reluctance.

But the merciful Author of our being has not dealt thus ſeverely with us. In the duties he has enjoined, he has not ſo much exerciſed his ſovereignty, as he has expreſſed his goodneſs; in requiring obedience to them, he is conferring a favour. They come recommended to us by their own eſſential, intrinſic worth. Approved by the natural ſentiments of the heart, they muſt, independently

pendently of any divine authority or ſanction, always have commanded our regard. How much happineſs did the Author of our nature intend us, when he gave us theſe laws, the laws of kindneſs, meant to eſtabliſh peace upon earth, to ſubdue all thoſe irregular, unruly paſſions, which are the ſources of private differences, or public diſcord, and to introduce into the world an inferior, temporary heaven,—a ſtate of univerſal harmony, benevolence, and happineſs? Such is the ſpirit and genius of the divine laws; evident indications of the benevolence of their Author, and of his kind attention to the happineſs of his creatures.

IV. But the goodneſs of God was moſt eminently diſplayed in the miſſion of his Son into the world for us, and our ſalvation. The temporal bleſſings with which his providence ſupplies our wants in this life, and the laws with which he has favoured us for the direction of our conduct, are indeed clear expreſſions of his loving-kindneſs, and demand every acknowledgement

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that gratitude can offer. But yet the condition of our preſent being is of ſmall moment, in compariſon of that immortal ſtate which is to ſucceed it; and little it would avail us to be ſupplied by his bounty with the conveniencies and comforts of this world, and to be inſtructed by his laws how to obtain all the felicity of the next, if every violation of thoſe laws were to forfeit that felicity, and bring down upon us the inflictions of his juſtice; if our ſins were to purſue us for ever, and no method of atonement were appointed to propitiate the Deity, and expiate our offences.

For ever adored, then, be that infinite goodneſs, which inclined him to look with an eye of pity upon our offences, to plan a method by which juſtice and mercy might meet together,—and to accept the ſufferings of a Redeemer, as a propitiatory oblation, an expiatory ſacrifice, for the ſins of his creatures. *Bleſſed, then, be the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the death of Chriſt, to an inhe-*

inheritance incorruptible, reſerved in heaven for us.——Which leads me,

V. To conſider the laſt moſt glorious diſplay of the divine goodneſs, viz. that heavenly inheritance, that never-ceaſing felicity, promiſed in the Goſpel to thoſe who obey its Laws.

And here we may obſerve, that though the happineſs of his creatures is the end which the Creator and Sovereign of the world has in view in his providence and government; yet he purſues this end by ſuch methods only as his moral perfections require. Divine goodneſs is a diſpoſition, not to make all his creatures indiſcriminately happy in any poſſible way, but to make the juſt, the good, the merciful, and upright, happy. And to thoſe he has promiſed ſuch good things as paſs man's underſtanding. We have no powers, no faculties, able to reach that ſublimity of happineſs which the righteous ſhall enjoy in another world.

But though the ſpecific nature, or the particulars, of that felicity which the divine goodneſs hath prepared for us, are not, cannot

not be revealed; yet thus much we know, that as far as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo far will the future manſions of bliſs tranſcend the moſt exquiſite enjoyments here below. For in heaven there will be fulneſs of joy; it will be complete and perfect, ſuited to the ſpiritual nature of the ſoul, and more than equal to its moſt enlarged deſires; not like earthly pleaſures, promiſing in expectation, and fallacious in poſſeſſion; not embittered with any painful mixture; not interrupted by diſquieting ſuſpicions, nor ſuceeded by uneaſy terrors;—but abounding with joys unſpeakable and full of glory; a glory, in compariſon of which the brighteſt ſcenes of worldly pleaſures are but ſhadows and illuſions. As the ſouls of juſt men are there made perfect, ſo their pleaſures are there pure and unmingled,—worthy of unbounded goodneſs to beſtow, and fit for immortal ſpirits to receive.

And further; as the joys of heaven are full, complete, and ſatisfactory, ſo alſo are they permanent and perpetual,—ſubject to no abatement, interruption, or decay; not on-

ly large beyond our utmoſt wiſhes, but laſting as our immortal ſouls. Heaven and earth may paſs away; the elements may melt with fervent heat; the earth, and the works that are therein, may be burnt up;—but our happineſs ſhall continue firm and ſtable, as invariable in its nature, as exquiſite in its glory; will never, never come to an end, nor ever approach nearer to it; but, after the longeſt duration we can conceive,—after all the millions of years or ages that the power of numbers can add together,—will be but commencing, and as far as ever from a period.

How eſtimable, how infinitely eſtimable, then, is this gift of exiſtence, which is never to be reſumed! How ſupremely adorable the goodneſs which confers it! What returns can we make for all the various expreſſions of the divine favour? With what ſincerity of heart, what impreſſions of piety, what fervour of devotion, ſhould our ſouls bleſs the Lord, and all that is within us praiſe his holy name! With what ardour of affection ought we to love Him, who hath ſo loved us! Let us, with the deep-

eſt

eſt reverence of ſoul, look up to the merciful Author of our being, and implore him to add one more to all his other bleſſings; to give us an heart duly ſenſible of them,—itſelf the greateſt we can poſſeſs.

Let us often reflect, what grateful acknowledgements are due, what an immenſe debt we owe, and muſt for ever owe, to Him whoſe mercies give us all we have, and will hereafter exceed all we can deſire; and be it remembered, that the beſt method of diſcharging this debt, is by a regular obedience to his laws, and a conſtant attention to form our manners by the example of his goodneſs. Has the Father of the univerſe, the Parent of good, ſupplied us with whatever is neceſſary to our ſubſiſtence, convenient for uſe, or pleaſant for enjoyment? is his goodneſs unlimited, and his hand ever open to fill all things living with plenteouſneſs?—let us, within our limited ſphere, do good to all, and diffuſe mercy over all our works; let us be merciful as He is merciful, and render ourſelves the agents of his providence, by diſtributing his alms, and conveying his bounty, to the indigent and needy.

Has

Has the Sovereign of the world given us laws, to be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths, to guide our ſteps in the way of peace, and to conduct us to manſions of future felicity? let us expreſs ſome little ſimilitude of the divine conduct, by our admonitions and inſtructions; by our endeavours to inform the ignorant, to reclaim the vitious, and direct the weak. Is the Supreme Being merciful and gracious? and does he forgive iniquity, and tranſgreſſion, and ſin? —let us have compaſſion on our fellow-ſervants, as our Lord hath pity upon us; let us forgive others their offences, as God, for Chriſt's ſake, hath forgiven ours; and let us, in a word, by a pious imitation of the divine goodneſs during our abode on earth, endeavour to obtain an admiſſion to that glorious diſplay, thoſe inconceivable manifeſtations of it, which he hath reſerved for our reward in heaven.

SER.

SERMON XXV.

Men Sojourners upon Earth.

Preached on New-year's day.

HEB. xiii. 14.

Here we have no continuing city, but we ſeek one to come.

THE text is a ſhort, but ſtriking deſcription, of the ſtate and condition of human life; intimating, that Nature has not aſſigned us this world for a permanent habitation; that we come not here to ſtay and make our abode; that we are only travellers in our way to eternity, every day ſetting out on our journey, haſtening forwards as faſt as time can carry us; and that life's ſhort pilgrimage muſt be quickly at an end. So

ſenſibly

ſenſibly felt, and ſo univerſally acknowledged, is indeed this inevitable lot of human nature, that it ſhould ſeem unneceſſary to be reminded of it; it ſhould ſeem, that the reflection cannot eſcape us, if we reflect at all. But the misfortune is, while we all own this in general, each neglects to bring home to himſelf the unwelcome truth; we ſeem to diſmiſs it from our thoughts, whenever it intrudes, and live as if we knew it not.

From the words of the text, therefore, I ſhall take occaſion, 1*ſt*, To remind us of the ſhort and tranſitory condition of human life; and, 2*dly*, Shall from thence deduce ſome inferences and reflections.

I. No ſooner are we capable of looking round us, and conſidering the frame of our nature, and the condition of our being, than we may obſerve, that, derived from duſt, we naturally haſten to duſt again; that none can claim the privilege of an exemption from the common neceſſity; that man cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; that the human, like the vegetable race, have

have their periods of growth and declenſion, and are either cut down by the hand of violence, or ſoon fade and drop of themſelves. Strangers and ſojourners here, as were all our fathers, we ſoon paſs away, and are gone.

Nature, in her moſt common appearances, is ever reminding us of the tranſience of our ſtate, in the ſucceſſion of day and night, and the rotation of the ſeaſons; is always admoniſhing us of the lapſe of time, and the decay of life. The day no ſooner dawns, than it begins to decline, and expires in darkneſs. We, in like manner, as ſoon as we are born, begin to draw to an end. The various ſeaſons of the year haſten to complete their ſhort periods. Human life has alſo its different ſeaſons, which quickly finiſh their appointed courſe. A little time ſoon paſſeth away in the ſpring and verdure of infancy; a little more, and the bloom of youth fades, and is loſt; a little more withers the ſtrength and vigour of our riper years; and if we live ſtill longer, to the winter of our age, a little time then lays our infirmities in the duſt. And thus days and years

years glide on in quick and conſtant ſucceſſion: we are borne along the ſilent, but rapid ſtream of time; and are ſoon conveyed down to that boundleſs ocean from whence none ever return.

The ſcripture, in a great variety of alluſions, repreſents the ſhortneſs of human life, and compares it to a wind that paſſeth away, and cometh not again; to a tale that is told, and forgotten; to a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and vaniſheth away. It admoniſhes us, that our days are ſwifter than a poſt; that they paſs away as the ſwift ſhips, and as the eagle that haſteth to the prey; that man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; that he fleeth alſo as a ſhadow, and continueth not.

II. I PROCEED to deduce ſome Reflections and Inferences from the ſhort duration and tranſitory condition of human life. Melancholy, indeed, would be the reflection, that we paſs away as a ſhadow, and fade as the flowers of the field, and that life muſt ſo quickly come to an end, if this life were the whole of our exiſtence, and we had no

proſpect,

proſpect, and no hope beyond it. But ſetting aſide other conſiderations, the ſhort term of our exiſtence here may give us grounds to hope, that it will be renewed and prolonged hereafter. For can we think, that man was not deſigned by his Maker to attain that perfection in wiſdom, and virtue, and happineſs, of which his nature is ſuſceptive? Can we imagine, that he is only to enter into the paths of knowledge, and when he has made ſome ſhort progreſs, and is better able to proceed, that he is to proceed no farther? or when he has begun to adorn his ſoul with wiſdom, and ennoble it with virtue, and is moſt fit to live, that he is to live no more? Can we believe, that we were introduced into this theatre of nature, only to go out again? or that at moſt we are juſt to appear, and act a ſhort part upon this ſtage, and ſhew what further improvements we are capable of,—and then, however well our character has been ſuſtained, to be diſmiſſed, and ſeen no more? Can this be the end of our being,—this all the buſineſs of life? and is the curtain then to drop, and the ſcene to cloſe for ever? Can we think that we were thus formed,

like ſome inſects, to be the creatures only, as it were, of a day; to flutter about a while, in the ſhort ſunſhine of live, and then to be extinct for ever?

Creatures inferior to the human ſpecies attain here, in their preſent ſtate, all the perfection their capacities can admit: their faculties ſhoot up to their full growth; and were they to live for ever, would for ever continue to be what they are. Whereas very different is the frame of the human mind: it is formed for a perpetual growth in wiſdom, for an everlaſting progreſs towards ſupreme perfection. But in this life, the wiſeſt of men fall far ſhort of thoſe improvements, and that perfection, for which Nature ſeems to have deſigned them: in underſtanding they are ſtill children, ſtill in a ſtate of infancy, in compariſon of that intellectual maturity to which they might arrive hereafter. Has the Author of nature, who can do nothing in vain, formed us with ſuch extenſive capacities, for ſo inconſiderable purpoſes? May we not rather be aſſured, from that wiſdom which ſhines conſpicuous in all his works, that man, when he dies, does

does not ceaſe to be; that death tranſlates us to another ſtate; that this world is only a nurſery for the next; that we here receive the firſt rudiments only of our being, to be afterwards tranſplanted into ſome happier climate, where we ſhall grow up to the utmoſt perfection of our nature, and flouriſh in immortal vigour to endleſs ages?

2*dly*, Meditation on our ſhort and uncertain ſtate in this world, may wean us from an overfondneſs for any thing in it. This world is not our home; we have here no continuing city; we are only travellers in our pilgrimage through the world, and ſhould not ſuffer our affections to be too much engaged by the conveniencies or pleaſures we may occaſionally meet with, as we cannot ſtay to enjoy them long; they are not our own, and we muſt ſhortly take our leave of them. Whatever entertainment or accomodations, then, we may meet with in the ſeveral ſtages on our road to eternity, we ought to regard them with the indifference of a gueſt that tarries but a day.

Due reflection on the narrow limits of human life, may balance all the ſeducements

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we meet with in it. When we conſider how ſoon life will come to an end, its pleaſures, profits, poſſeſſions, all that the World calls happineſs, muſt loſe much of their reputed value, and ſink in our eſtimation. For why ſhould we ſet our whole affections on objects which we muſt one day, may to-day, be obliged to relinquiſh and forſake? Why labour, and wear out life, in the anxious, but fruitleſs, purſuit of what we muſt quit almoſt as ſoon as acquired? Why all this extreme attention to add field to field, and houſe to houſe, as if life, and its enjoyments, where never to have an end; ſince we are here only ſtrangers and ſojourners, and muſt ſoon remove our habitation, and then whoſe ſhall all theſe things be?

We ſurely forget how ſhort and fleeting life is, when we expend it wholly on temporary objects. Do we employ all our cares in accumulating and laying up much goods for many years? conſider for how ſhort a term we are to poſſeſs them. Conſider, that we are on the road to another world, travelling with ſpeed to our eternal home, whither riches will not follow, and where they cannot

cannot profit us, unleſs we are now careful to remit them thither in acts of goodneſs, beneficence, and mercy. Let the ambitious man, who is impatient to obtain ſome high ſtation of dignity and honour, let him viſit (in imagination at leaſt) the awful manſions of the dead; and let him reflect, that ſoon he alſo muſt be added to the number, muſt be ſummoned to pay the ſame debt of nature, be blended with the ſame common earth; his honours, like theirs, laid in the duſt, and a narrow grave be one day all that the moſt ſucceſsful ambition can poſſeſs. Is pleaſure our object? we are departing and flying from it, as faſt as the wings of time can bear us, even at the very inſtant we mean to purſue it.

In a word, the ſhort and precarious tenure we have of the riches, honours, or pleaſures of life, is a conſideration which, properly attended to, would naturally moderate our affection to them. Were we to reflect, how ſoon we muſt, and how ſuddenly we may, bid adieu to the world, we ſhould ſet no high price upon it. We ſhould rather endeavour to diſengage ourſelves, and become

become indifferent to its enjoyments, that we may, without embarraſſment or diſcompoſure, take a final leave, (for a final leave we muſt take); and in the mean time may employ our temporal life in the great purpoſe of inſuring that which is eternal. And would we but attend to the information that Religion gives us concerning the felicity of that eternal ſtate, we ſhould ſet no value on any thing here below, but as it might ſerve to accommodate us in our paſſage to a better country; we would no longer ſuffer our minds, like our bodies, to be confined to the earth: nothing would detain our affections here; they would riſe above all temporal objects, and aſcend, as we hope our Souls will do, from earth to heaven, from time to eternity.

3*dly*, The conſideration of the ſhortneſs of life may aſſiſt in ſupporting us under its afflictions. As we are here but pilgrims and ſtrangers, we may expect to meet with the uſual inconveniences and diſaſters of travellers, and that evil may ſometimes befall us in the way. But under ſuch circumſtances, we may always find conſolation in reflecting,

that

that our pilgrimage here cannot be of long continuance; that whatever difficulties we may encounter, whatever labours we ſuſtain; however rigorous the ſeaſons may be, or to whatever ſtorms we are expoſed;—yet that the vale of life is but ſhort; that beyond it there lies a region of perpetual ſerenity, never clouded with evil, where no ſtorms invade, no tempeſts ever approach. We may always ſupport ourſelves under ſufferings, as we can always ſee a period of them, and have a proſpect of thoſe manſions of peace whither afflictions cannot purſue us, and where it will be indifferent to us what our condition has been here.

If, indeed, we had been born never to die,—if we had been doomed to live for ever in this world,—infinite weight would have been added to our afflictions, as they might thereby have become irremediable and eternal. But, happily for us, life will come to an end, and all our ſufferings will end with it. And no troubles need much to afflict us, if we conſider heaven as our home, and this life only as a paſſage to a better, where our light afflictions will be over paid with

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an unfading crown of glory. All the difficulties and labours we now ſuſtain, will in a ſhort time be forgotten, and be as if they had never been. And of what mighty conſequence is it, if we ſuffer here, provided we eſcape the ſufferings hereafter? or if we are denied our good things in this world, if we receive them with eternal intereſt in the next?

Laſtly, If the time of our ſojourning in this world be but ſhort and momentary, in compariſon of the next,—let the great and habitual object of our attention be that ſtate which may ſoon begin, but can never end. If "we have here no continuing city, let us ſeek one to come." Let us remember, that we are here travellers only; temporary, not fixed inhabitants; that our ſecond, better reſidence, is beyond the grave; that there is the country of our reſt and happineſs, our home, and the end of our being; that to that better country we are haſtening apace; and that every revolving year brings us nearer to it.

At this ſeaſon, it muſt naturally occur, that

that as one year more of life is now elapſed, and we have conſequently a year leſs to live, we are a ſtep nearer to eternity, and ought therefore to be more vigilant in our preparation for it. May we all attend to this obvious, but important, yet neglected conſideration; may the preſent ſeaſon be to all of us the commencement of a new and better obedience; may we all reſolve, ſo to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wiſdom,—that wiſdom which cometh from above, and teaches us to fix our affections there; may each ſucceeding year (if Heaven vouchſafes us a ſucceſſion of years) find us proceeding in goodneſs, as we advance in age,—going on ſtill towards perfection, as we draw nearer to the period of life; may our religious progreſs keep pace with the fleeting years; may we ſeize them as they approach, and engage them in the ſervice of wiſdom and virtue!—ſo may we hope, when we bring our years to an end; when Nature ſummons us to depart hence; when we have finiſhed our pilgrimage through this vale of life, and muſt no longer be permitted to ſojourn here be-

low;—ſo may we hope, that we may be deemed worthy of the rewards of virtue; worthy to be admitted into everlaſting habitations, to the bleſſed manſions of immortality, to a continuing city, the city of the living God, where we ſhall for ever dwell.

SER-

SERMON XXVI.

Againſt Evil-ſpeaking.

JAM. iv. 11.

Speak not evil one of another.

IT is in many inſtances obſervable, that what is of the greateſt utility to mankind, may, by miſapplication, be productive of the moſt pernicious effects; and that the beſt things, by abuſe and corruption, may become the worſt. An obvious confirmation of this is the abuſe of that faculty, the intention of which we pervert when we ſpeak evil one of another. The faculty of language is a diſtinguiſhing mark of our Maker's ſuperior regard to mankind; and his deſign in conferring it was, doubtleſs, to elevate us above the herds of the field; to pro-

promote all the purpoſes of ſocial life; to enable us to inform each other of the otherwiſe illegible characters of the heart; to conſult together for mutual or general benefit; and to unite mankind in cloſe ſociety by the ties of converſe and friendſhip.

But too often we ſee this power, given for the nobleſt and beſt, perverted to the worſt of purpoſes, and employed to diſturb, diſorder, and embroil mankind, inſtead of rendering them what Nature and Religion intended,—mutual helps and comforts. Among the various perverſions of this power, there are few in their nature ſo infamous, none perhaps in practice ſo univerſal, as the crime of Evil-ſpeaking. For how ready a propenſion do we obſerve in mankind to aſſume a kind of juriſdiction over others; to erect, as it were, private courts of inquiſition; to ſit in judgement upon characters; and to paſs ſentence, not as truth and reaſon, as charity, or equity, or juſtice direct, —but too often according to the evidence given by ſelf-conceit and vanity, envy or pride, reſentment or malice. For theſe are the falſe witneſſes that riſe up againſt our neigh-

neighbour, and prevail with us to condemn him; theſe are the paſſions that tincture the behaviour, and give a colour to the manners of mankind, too apparent to eſcape the eye of the ſlighteſt obſerver.

The envious feel a moſt ſenſible pleaſure in building their own reputation upon the ruins of another. The vain and the proud never taſte a more exquiſite ſatisfaction, than when they add a luſtre to their own character, and exhibit it in the faireſt light, by throwing into ſhade the merits of others. The malicious and reſentful delight in pulling down the higheſt characters, blackening the faireſt, diſtorting the moſt upright, and in miſrepreſenting all.

But, however agreeable this vice of evil-ſpeaking may appear to corrupt paſſions, it can never be reconciled to the laws of Reaſon, nor to the principles of Religion, both of which equally prohibit and condemn the practice of the ſlanderer.

I ſhall in this diſcourſe conſider, 1*ſt*, The nature and extent of this vice of evil-ſpeaking; and, 2*dly*, Shall offer ſome conſiderations

tions to diſcourage ſo common, but iniquitous a practice.

I. By evil-ſpeaking may be underſtood any manner of expreſſion which tends to impair the reputation of another; to detract from the eſteem he poſſeſſes; to diminiſh the current value that is put upon him, and for which he has been generally received; and to make him paſs for leſs in the public eſtimation than before.

That it may appear, when, and how far, we become guilty of this crime, it may be proper to trace it in its ſeveral kinds and degrees. —The higheſt and moſt flagitious ſpecies of this crime is, when a falſe Teſtimony is deliberately given in a court of Judicature, injurious to the perſon, property, or character, of our neighbour. This crime is ſo ſhameful a proſtitution of conſcience,—the guilt of it is blackened by ſuch various aggravations; as it is injurious to the common intereſts of mankind; a violation of the higheſt and moſt ſacred ſanction that can be given to a teſtimony; committed, not by inadvertence or ſurpriſe, but in the moſt ſolemn

lemn and deliberate manner, with a determined contempt of laws, both human and divine;—it is ſuch a complication of iniquity and impiety, ſo utterly ſubverſive of truth, juſtice, and equity, and of the public good, and order and peace of ſociety,—that a falſe witneſs is juſtly beheld with deteſtation, as a common enemy of mankind, and his name deſervedly branded with the deepeſt characters of infamy.

2*dly*, Another degree of evil-ſpeaking is, when, with equal, though leſs avowed virulence, we blot the character, and ſtain the honour, of others, in common Converſation, by aſperſions which we know to be falſe and calumnious. Highly injurious is this practice, and admits of no vindication. It robs our neighbour of his property; for every one's good name is his property, to which he has an undoubted right, till it be juſtly forfeited. It deprives him of a poſſeſſion which is, and muſt be highly valued; for a tender concern for a good name is made dear to us by the original principles of our minds, and is a part of our nature. And what adds to the injury is, that it is often

often in a great meaſure irreparable; for the wounds given to a reputation are not only painful, but are ſeldom, and with difficulty, healed. The Slanderer, then, who forges or propagates known defamation, is criminal in the next degree to him who bears falſe witneſs againſt his neighbour in a court of juſtice.

3*dly*, Another more prevailing, though leſs malignant, ſpecies of this vice, is the ſpreading defamatory reports of others, without competent examination, or ſufficient knowledge of the truth of them. Under this head may be compriſed various methods and arts of defamation; ſome more groſs, avowed, and direct; others more concealed, ſubtle, and refined. This ſpecies of ſlander is capable of various degrees of aggravation. The moſt guilty are they, who, with malevolent intention, circulate the uncertain reports of calumny; the leaſt criminal, though far from being innocent, is the inadvertent, undeſigning ſlanderer,—who, without malice, or reſentment, or envy, for mere amuſement, feaſts, as it were, on the ſuppoſed foibles of other characters, and

ſerves

ſerves them up for the entertainment of his gueſts.

But here it may be proper to obſerve, that every cenſure of another's faults does not come under the character of defamation. It is allowable, e. g. to diſcloſe a perſon's faults to a Friend, in the ſacredneſs of friendſhip, without any intention to ſtigmatiſe or injure; for this is only, what it is often ſaid to be, "thinking aloud;"—or, to the World, when it becomes neceſſary to our own juſt ſelf-defence; for we are no where required to love our neighbour better than ourſelves. It is allowable alſo to detect a perſon's vices, to pull off the maſk from a character, and ſhew its true features to the innocent and unſuſpecting, who, we apprehend, may ſuffer by entertaining too favourable ſentiments, and repoſing too intire a confidence in him; for it is often of conſequence to the ſecurity of individuals, of a neighbourhood, and of a community, that the characters of the diſhoneſt, as well as of the juſt and good, ſhould be ſufficiently known. We may likewiſe cenſure all open offenders. Such perſons ſhould meet with infamy, as

public as their offence; for infamy is as much a due puniſhment for evil-doers, as praiſe is the juſt reward of them that do well. But, with theſe exceptions, it is a duty not to ſpeak evil one of another, and to avoid whatever has the malignant aſpect or appearance of ſlander.——Which brings me,

II. To offer ſome conſiderations in order to diſcourage this practice.

1*ſt*, We ſhould be cautious and temperate in the cenſure we paſs on the conduct of others, leſt we ſhould happen to do them injuſtice: for we can only judge by Appearances, which are often equivocal and fallacious. Actions may have the Appearance of evil, which in themſelves were innocent, or laudable. We cannot diſcern the heart, or its intentions; but yet theſe internal ſprings are neceſſary to be known, before we can be capable of forming an accurate and equal judgement concerning the conduct of others. It is the Intention that determines the moral nature of the action; but the innocence or guilt of actions may often depend on

on circumſtances which can be known only to God, and to Conſcience. The human heart is ſo impenetrable, except to him that made it; and the moral nature of actions varies ſo much, according to the different motives which give them birth,—that, in all caſes, our Judgements concerning them ought to be given with caution, and tempered with candour.

2*dly*, Let us reflect, how illiberal, how malevolent, is the practice of entertaining ourſelves, or others, at the expence of our neighbour's good name. To ſee this in a true light, let us recollect, what we felt, what were our ſenſations, when any attempt was made upon our character, or any treacherous wound given to our reputation. Such, and ſo painful, we may conclude, will be the feelings of another in the ſame circumſtances; and our conſcience will tell us, that we ought not to be guilty of that behaviour to others, which we would reſent when offered to ourſelves. Reputation is a ſpecies of property always highly valued by its owner. It is one of the laſt things a liberal mind would ſubmit to loſe, and by

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ſome has been held in ſuperior eſtimation to life itſelf. It is what a wiſe and good man regards as a valuable poſſeſſion, and, next to a good Conſcience, is the beſt ſupport where other treaſures are wanting. But if we rob or defraud him of this poſſeſſion, this treaſure, this pearl which no price can purchaſe,—we may do him an injury greater than we can either eſtimate or repair. It may be impoſſible to make an eſtimate of the injury, as we cannot with certainty know what benefit he might have received, if no diſadvantageous impreſſion had been given of him: and it is ſeldom in our power to make reparation by any after attempts to clear up his character; for the vindication of an injured character never extends ſo far, or ſpreads ſo wide, is never ſo quickly propagated, nor ſo well received, as the reproach.

How much more humane and generous is it, to ſtand up in defence of our neighbour's fame; to reſcue his character when attacked, and to heal it when wounded; to do juſtice to his merits, and to extenuate his failings; to produce his good qualities into light,

light, and to throw a veil over his miſconduct? In ſome circumſtances, to mention the good, or barely to conceal the evil, we know of another, may be as expreſſive of benevolence, and as kind an act of charity, as to relieve him in his greateſt neceſſities. And in this particular, whatever may be our ſtation of life, we all have it in our power to be charitable. Charity, in other inſtances, may be an expenſive, may be an inconvenient, perhaps an impracticable duty; but this alms the moſt indigent may beſtow, and the moſt avaricious need not grudge: a good word is a cheap and eaſy donation, that coſts us nothing.

3*dly*, Let us conſider, how much better we ſhould be employed, if, inſtead of being quick in diſcerning, malignant in marking, and ſevere in reprehending, the faults or foibles of others, we would turn our eyes inward, and be attentive to our own. Were theſe to be placed in a diſtinct view before us, the conſciouſneſs of failings would dictate to us that candour in reſpect to the actions of others, which we would find ſo neceſſary to a favourable conſtruction of our

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own. Happy were it for mankind, if they would reflect with ſeverity on their own miſconduct, and with tenderneſs on that of their neighbour; if they would conſider their own defects with the rigour of juſtice, thoſe of others with the ſoftenings of humanity; if they would be leſs watchful to ſpy out the leaſt mote in another's eye, whilſt they are inattentive to the beam in their own. A perfect character is no where to be found. The moſt accompliſhed of human beings have their failings, the beſt their infirmities, the moſt prudent their indiſcretions. Let us, with a careful and impartial eye, look into ourſelves, and we ſhall there ſee enough to make us leſs forward to cenſure and calumniate. The ſtricteſt inquirers into their own, are the moſt candid interpreters of others conduct. He who knows, and has well conſidered, his own weakneſs, will be ſevere on none but himſelf; and ſeverity then becomes juſt and laudable, when our own miſdeeds are the ſubjects of it.

Laſtly, Let it be obſerved, that Words are not of ſo ſlight a value in a moral eſtimate as ſome may apprehend. All ſin iſſues from the

the heart; and whether it appears in language or action, the guilt may be the ſame. *Whoſo bridleth not his tongue*, the ſcripture informs us, *his religion is vain.* By our words, we are told, we ſhall be juſtified, and by our words condemned. And this vice of evil-ſpeaking is always enumerated among thoſe ſins for which we muſt give a ſevere account at the day of Judgement.

If, then, we deſire a favourable ſentence from our heavenly Judge, let us, even in our words and converſation, ſhew that lenity and candour to others, which we ſhall all ſtand in need of at that great and awful day; and then, we may hope, our lenity to others may plead for compaſſion to ourſelves; and that God will be as merciful to our failings, as we have been tender to thoſe of our brethren. *Let all bitterneſs*, then, *and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-ſpeaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God for Chriſt's ſake forgiveth you.*

SER-

SERMON XXVII.

On Vitious Habits.

JER. xiii. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good that are accuſtomed to do evil.

FEW perſons perhaps there are ſo totally devoid of principle, as not to believe their exiſtence in a future ſtate; and few ſo loſt to all ſentiments of goodneſs, ſo hardened againſt all impreſſions of duty, as not, in conſequence of that belief, to form ſome occaſional purpoſes of reforming their manners, and providing for that exiſtence. For it is not poſſible to extinguiſh in ourſelves the deſire of happineſs; nor is it eaſy to ſuppreſs our natural perceptions of the criminality

nality of ſin, or our fear of the inflictions conſequent upon it. The ſinner, therefore, when reproached by conſcience, acknowledges his guilt; but yet is apt to perſiſt in his vices, with a view of blotting them out by future repentance and reformation. Secure, as he thinks, in this illuſion, he poſtpones to ſome diſtant, indeterminate period, the important duty; not conſidering, that by perſevering in the path of iniquity, and going on from ſin to ſin, his retreat becomes every day more difficult and impracticable and he loſes both the inclination, and almoſt the power, of reforming.

In order, then, to prevent this ſelf-deception, we may do well to conſider the words of the text: *Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good who are accuſtomed to do evil.* Theſe words, we may obſerve, are not to be ſtrictly and literally underſtood, as if it were indeed as abſolutely impoſſible for the ſinner to correct and reform the diſpoſition of his heart, as for the Ethiopian to change his ſkin. This illuſtration the prophet makes uſe of, only to mark the extreme diffi-

difficulty the ſons of wickedneſs may expect to find, and which approaches near to a natural impoſſibility to ſurmount, when they begin the work of reformation at a time when their ſins have acquired ſtrength and maturity, and by long habits are deeply rooted in the mind.

In this diſcourſe I ſhall conſider, 1*ſt*, The danger of contracting, and the difficulty of reforming, vitious habits; and, 2*dly*, Shall obſerve, that though the taſk be difficult, the difficulty may be overcome by proper reſolution, and the ſinner may have it in his power to return to duty, and reconcile himſelf to God.

I. THERE is in human nature ſo unhappy an inclination and propenſity to ſin, that attention and vigilance are always requiſite to oppoſe this inclination, and maintain our integrity. Our paſſions and affections, inſtead of ſubmitting to the government of Reaſon, and acting under its directions, as was originally deſigned, are apt to remonſtrate againſt its orders, and diſclaim its authority. But when this innate propenſity to ſin,

ſin, inſtead of being corrected and reformed by diſcipline and reaſon, acquires additional ſtrength by cuſtom and habit,—the difficulty of reſiſting, and the conſequent danger, becomes ſtill more unſurmountable. The power and influence of Habit is the ſubject of daily obſervation. Even in matters merely mechanical, where no attention of mind is required, cuſtom and practice give, we know, an expertneſs and facility not otherwiſe to be acquired. The caſe is the ſame, however unaccountable, in the operations of the Mind. Actions frequently repeated form habits, and habits approach near to natural propenſions. And ſuch is the nature of all habits, that the longer we perſevere, the more we are confirmed in them; and ſuch is our nature, that our actions are more determined by cuſtom and habit, than by principle.

But if ſuch be the influence of habits in general, vitious ones are ſtill peculiarly powerful. If the power of cuſtom be on all occaſions apt to prevail, we ſhall have ſtill leſs inclination to oppoſe it, where the object to which we accuſtom ourſelves

is

is naturally agreeable, and ſuited to our corruption. Here all the reſolution we can ſummon to our aſſiſtance, will be requiſite, and perhaps ineffectual. For if the firſt impulſes of paſſion, the firſt aſſaults of temptation, are ſometimes ſo hard to be reſiſted; what oppoſition can we make againſt them when they are aided and reinforced by habit and indulgence? How ſhall we be able, when we knew not how to ſuſtain the firſt onſet of vice; when yet ſhame and fear, when education and religion, were placed as guards upon our virtue;—how ſhall we be able to oppoſe the enemy, when thoſe guards are removed, and we ſtand expoſed to him defenceleſs and unarmed?

We may form an idea of the unhappy ſituation of an habitual offender, from the difficulty we find in conquering even an indifferent cuſtom. What was at firſt optional and voluntary, becomes by degrees in a manner neceſſary, and almoſt unavoidable. For though it is eaſy to contract ill habits, it is not without violence, and ſelf-denial, to which we are always averſe, that we

we can diſengage ourſelves from them, or even form a deſire to be diſengaged.

And yet, beſides the natural force of cuſtom and habit, other conſiderations there are, which add to the difficulty of reforming vitious manners. By vitious habits we impair the underſtanding, and our perception of the moral diſtinction of actions becomes leſs clear and diſtinct. The progreſs of iniquity is always gradual. No man becomes at once a proficient in wickedneſs; nor is it eaſy at firſt to diſregard the admonitions of reaſon and conſcience. Smaller offences, under the plauſible pretext of being ſuch, gain the firſt admittance to the heart. And he who has been induced to comply with one ſin, becauſe it is a ſmall one, will be tempted to a ſecond, from the conſideration, that it is not much worſe: And the ſame plea will lead him on gradually to another, and another, of ſtill greater magnitude. When he thus becomes familiar with ſin, and ſuffers its frequent approaches, and finds that no harm has happened unto him, and that vengeance ſtill ſuffers him to live,—he begins to think

ſin

ſin not ſo hateful in its nature, nor ſo fatal in its conſequences, as it is repreſented: it aſſumes a leſs hideous ſhape; its deformity wears off; the horror with which it ought to be, and is at firſt generally attended, abates; he becomes reconciled to it; his Judgement ſubmits to his Inclinations; every new ſin is commited with leſs reluctance than the former; and he endeavours to find out reaſons, ſuch as they are, to juſtify and vindicate what he is determined to perſiſt in, and to practiſe. And thus, by habits of ſinning, we cloud the underſtanding, and render it in a manner incapable of diſtinguiſhing moral good and evil; and by degrees reduce ourſelves to that unhappy condition which the Apoſtle deſcribes by being dead in treſpaſſes and ſins; when all moral feeling, all ſenſibility of virtue and religion is ſo far loſt in us, that it is almoſt as difficult to awake to a ſenſe of duty, and to newneſs of life, as it is to raiſe and reanimate the dead.

But, further, as by long practice and perſeverance in ſin, we loſe or impair the moral diſcernment and feeling of the mind; ſo, by the

the ſame means, we provoke the Almighty to withdraw his aſſiſting Grace, long beſtowed in vain. For though his Holy Spirit is always ready to lend ſuccour to thoſe who aſk, and endeavour to co-operate with his influences; yet he will not, we are aſſured, ſtrive with thoſe who reſiſt; but being often oppoſed and grieved, will at length retire, and abandon them to their own guidance, and to the counſels of their own corruption; no longer chuſing thoſe temples for his reſidence, which they have ſo often, and ſo profanely violated and defiled.

And how melancholy, how wretched, muſt be the ſtate of perſons thus forſaken by their God,—left expoſed to the aſſaults of temptations, and deſtitute of that divine armour whereby alone they can be enabled to overcome or reſiſt them! It is not in man, thus diſordered and depraved, to order his ſteps aright. The ſervants and ſlaves of ſin, we cannot, by our own unaſſiſted ſtrength, reſcue ourſelves from the fatal ſervitude. For if, at the beſt, we ſtand in need of the divine direction and grace, how much more do we want the heavenly

venly aid, when our minds are totally corrupt, when we delight in our bondage, are in love with our chains, and have not ſo much as a deſire of reſtoration to liberty? For then, indeed, when we have moſt occaſion for ſuch aid, we have generally the leaſt inclination to apply for it. For when men begin to have a diſcernment of the fatal error and conſequences of their conduct,—ſtruck with a ſenſe of their danger, they are apt to deſpair of that Grace which they have ſo oft received in vain. Conſcious of guilt, they are afraid to look up to that God whom they have ſo much offended. Self-convicted, they cannot lift up their eyes to Heaven with any hopes of mercy and forgiveneſs there. For all theſe reaſons, it is dangerous to contract, difficult to reform, vitious habits.

II. YET, notwithſtanding this difficulty and danger, the ſinner may have it in his power to return to duty, and reconcile himſelf to God. The occaſion of deſpondency in this ſituation is the remorſe men feel from a conſciouſneſs of guilt; which yet is a fa-

vourable ſymptom, as it indicates a diſpoſition and deſire to recover themſelves from it. Though the ſinner, when he ſcrutiniſes his conduct, may find in it all the grounds and reaſons of deſpair; yet due conſideration of the patience, the compaſſion, and goodneſs of God, may, in the moſt deſponding mind, kindle hopes of mercy. When once the ſinner feels his guilt,—feels juſt impreſſions of his own diſobedience, and of the conſequent diſpleaſure and reſentment of Heaven; if he is ſerious in his reſolutions to reſtore himſelf by repentance to the favour of his offended God; God, who is ever ready to meet and receive the returning penitent, will aſſiſt his reſolution with ſuch a portion of his grace, as may be ſufficient, if not totally, at once, to extirpate vitious habits, (for ſuch ſudden, inſtantaneous converſions we are not to expect), yet gradually to produce a diſpoſition to virtue; ſo that, if not wanting to himſelf, he ſhall not fail to become ſuperior to the power of inveterate habits. In this caſe, indeed, no endeavours on his part ought to be neglected,—no attempts left unessayed,

eſſayed, to recommend himſelf to the throne of mercy.

From what has been obſerved, they who are young, and as yet unpractiſed in the vices of the world, may learn wiſely to conſider with what facility and advantage they may now enter upon duties of religion, whilſt the mind is diſengaged,—not enſlaved by vitious habits, free from bad impreſſions, and capable of the beſt. Whereas, if they neglect this opportunity of giving virtue prior poſſeſſion of the heart, and of forming their manners by its rules, and ſhould unhappily ſuffer ſin and vice to get admittance there,—theſe will be every day extending their influence, and acquiring additional ſtrength; and it will be a work of difficulty and labour to conquer and expell them.

Never, therefore, think of poſtponing the care of your ſalvation to the day of old age; never think of treaſuring up to yourſelves difficulties, ſorrows, repentance, and remorſe, againſt an age, the diſorders and infirmities of which are themſelves ſo hard to be ſuſtained. Let not theſe be the comforts reſerved for that period of life which ſtands

moſt

moſt in need of conſolation. What confuſion muſt cover the ſelf-convicted ſinner, grown old in iniquity! How muſt he wiſh to blot out the memory of former years, when he looks back, and ſees them marked with various guilt, and filled up with a ſucceſſion of vices and crimes! And how will he be able, when bending beneath the burden of years and infirmities, to attempt the conqueſt of habits by which he has been always enſlaved,—and to diſengage himſelf from chains in which he has long been a captive! How reluctant to attempt a taſk to which he has always been unequal, and to travel a difficult road, which opens to him, indeed, happier proſpects, but has hitherto been found impracticable! Remember, therefore, your Creator in the days of your Youth.

But if any of us have unhappily loſt this firſt, beſt ſeaſon of devoting ourſelves to God, —and have reſerved nothing but ſhame, ſorrow, and remorſe, for the entertainment of riper years;—let the review of former tranſgreſſions be an incitement to immediate Repentance; let us, without delay, apply our heart

heart to the work of ſalvation, with an attention ſuited to its importance, and with a reſolution equal to the difficulties occaſioned by the influence of long-eſtabliſhed habits: —and then we have good grounds to hope, that the neceſſary aids of Divine Grace will not be wanting; that we may look up to Heaven with hopes of mercy; that, however we may be tied and bound with the chain of our ſins, our Maker will ſtretch forth the right hand of his power to ſave and deliver us. For the God of truth hath aſſured us, that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that aſk it; that no time is limited when the gate of mercy ſhall be ſhut againſt the penitent; that *whenever the wicked man will turn from his ſins that he hath committed, and do that which is lawful and right, all his tranſgreſſions that he hath committed, ſhall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteouſneſs that he hath done, he ſhall live.*

The END.

20 JU 66

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